

# SPECIAL EDUCATION DISTRICT OF LAKE COUNTY

## Diagnostic Program & Interim Alternative Education Setting (IAES) at Connections Day School

The SEDOL Diagnostic & IAES programs are both housed within Connections Day School (CDS). **Despite this physical proximity, these programs are separate from the therapeutic alternative school program at CDS.** CDS is a private therapeutic day school, providing academic, therapeutic, and family support for special education students within Lake County and surrounding areas.

Both the Diagnostic and IAES programs are a unique combination of academic, therapeutic and behavioral services, provided in a highly individualized manner, so that the needs of each student can be met most effectively. Students enrolled in both of these programs intermingle in classrooms, with approximately 10- 12 students, a special education teacher and at least one instructional aide/program assistant to ensure the maximum amount of one-on-one support.

### DIAGNOSTIC PROGRAM

The SEDOL Diagnostic Program at CDS is an alternative educational setting designed to provide individualized programming within the framework of an academic and therapeutic environment. When a student's current placement is seemingly not meeting his or her emotional, behavioral, or psychiatric needs, the school district and parents may be in agreement that an alternative placement is necessary for a temporary time period to further assess the student's educational needs. The student can be a regular education student needing an alternative placement while undergoing an Initial Case Study Evaluation, or it can be a Special Education Student needing an alternative placement while undergoing a reevaluation. In either case, the student would receive these evaluations along with all of the academic, therapeutic and behavioral supports traditionally offered at CDS.

The Diagnostic placement is a 60-school-day program. At the end of those 60 days, a staffing is held to review all of the diagnostic data and academic and therapeutic observations. Special education eligibility will be discussed; if a student is found eligible for special education services, an individualized education plan (IEP) will be created, or the existing IEP will be

modified as needed. Placement options will also be discussed. If the student is not found eligible for special education services, a plan for the student's transition back into mainstream classes will be formulated.

***Referrals are made by a student's home school district, directly to the CDS Diagnostic Coordinator, Dr. Giovanna Vitullo: 847.680.8349, ext. 307 OR [gvitullo@connectionsdayschool.net](mailto:gvitullo@connectionsdayschool.net).***

## **INTERIM ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTING (IAES)**

SEDOL has also contracted with CDS to provide a placement option for students who require an Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES). An IAES is required whenever a student has been involved in a behavioral infraction, leading to his/her expulsion from the home school district. Continuation of services is mandated at the time of an expulsion. The IAES program at CDS will:

- 1.** Enable the student to continue participating in his/her general academic curriculum
- 2.** Enable the student to continue receiving services and modifications listed in his/her IEP
- 3.** Include services and modifications designed to address the behavior that led to the disciplinary action.

This placement will include Case Study Re-Evaluation components, updated behavior, therapeutic & academic observations as well as intensive therapeutic, academic & behavior interventions.

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This IAES placement is a 45-school-day program. At the end of those 45 days, a conference will be held to discuss the re-evaluation, update the IEP, plan for the student's transition back to their prior educational placement, and/or discuss other appropriate placement options.

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## **DIAGNOSTIC/IAES STAFFING PURPOSE/PROCEDURES**

At the end of a student's time within the Diagnostic & IAES programs, a multidisciplinary staffing is held to discuss the case study evaluation components, academic and therapeutic progress, and any other areas relevant to a student's needs. Participants at this meeting typically include the following:

- ✓ Parents/guardians ✓ Student ✓ Staff
- representatives from the student's home district ✓
- Staff representatives from the diagnostic program
- ✓ SEDOL (Special Education District of Lake County)

The meeting is generally divided into three sections: discussion of case study evaluation information; discussion regarding special education eligibility and creation/revision of IEP if necessary; and placement options.

## **PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY**

The staff within the Diagnostic and IAES programs believes that all students can learn and be successful. Through the development of supportive and nurturing relationships, our staff enables students to make academic progress and learn the skills necessary to succeed. A primary goal is to allow students to understand their own behavior - how it affects their interpersonal relationships, and opportunities for success.

Students are encouraged to learn new, more appropriate ways of interacting in order to get their needs met. With guidance from faculty, students focus on and evaluate their behaviors as being supportive, or non-supportive, or their desired outcomes. Problems that may arise during classroom activities are seen as opportunities for growth and learning. Our staff utilizes a cognitive/behavioral and narrative problem solving approach to help students identify the challenge and practice more successful behavioral alternatives. While students may experience the logical consequences to problematic behavior, the approach is always positive and non-punitive. We do not encourage the use of isolation, physical restraint or other aversive interventions unless needed to ensure the safety of the student and school milieu. Instead, we utilize effective social skill building and creative behavior modification techniques designed to help each student develop strategies to improve his/her educational performance.

The behavior management policies of the Diagnostic and IAES programs are highly individualized, using both anticipated and actual behavior problems as positive teaching opportunities. A consistent cognitive restructuring model is used to help the student learn the skills and behaviors necessary to succeed in the school environment.

When problematic behaviors arise during the school day, our staff will work with the student in identifying alternative ways in which the situation could have been handled. At times, students may persist in disruptive and/or disturbing behaviors. When this occurs, staff will make every effort to remove the immediate stressor from the situation. If a student is deemed to be a possible threat to his/her own safety,

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or the safety of others, therapeutic holding and restraint may be necessary to ensure the safety of all involved. Our staff is fully trained in the Crisis Prevention Institute guidelines of such intervention.

## **SERVICES OFFERED**

**ACADEMICS** Students experience highly individualized instructional support. Our teaching staff works closely with the home school districts to ensure that students continue earning appropriate academic credit. Each district is asked to provide a current course listing, which is facilitated within the Diagnostic or IAES programs in one of two ways: 1) Home districts may provide their own textbooks and curriculum for students to use; 2) Districts may request that their student follow the curriculum already in place within the framework of Connections Day School (*this is most common*). With either option, the primary objective is to help students earn the maximum amount of credit possible, bringing them closer to the ultimate goal of high school graduation.

**INDIVIDUAL THERAPY** Therapeutic services are an integral part of your student's stay in the Diagnostic or IAES program at CDS. Each student is assigned to an individual therapist, who will meet with him/her at least 40 min per week. These sessions will focus on a wide variety of issues, including the presenting issue/concern, increasing levels of self-awareness, problem solving, communication, and relationship skills. The individual therapist will also complete a Social and Developmental History with each student and his/her family, as part of the Case Study Evaluation/Reevaluation.

**GROUP THERAPY** Group therapy is provided on a daily basis in the Diagnostic and IAES programs. These sessions are designed to address specific topics such as anger management, relationship issues, relaxation skills, interpersonal communication, as well as specialty groups for Drug & Alcohol Education, Art Therapy, and Music Appreciation. There are also a number of specialty groups that operate outside of the classroom.

**FAMILY THERAPY** Family work is seen as an essential component in your child's placement in the

Diagnostic/IEAS programs. The individual therapist assigned to your child will expect to meet with you at least once per month. Primary goals include completion of the Social/Developmental History, improving communication and listening skills between family members, identifying mutual goals and accompanying plan for success, and any other specific concerns you feel would be helpful to address in family sessions. In addition, a monthly Family Support Group is offered to all families within the Diagnostic/IAES programs and Connections Day School. This can serve as a valuable outlet, allowing you to talk with other parents/guardians struggling with similar challenges and receive support and guidance from Connections Day School's therapeutic staff.

**CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY SERVICES** Many students who are enrolled in the Diagnostic/IAES programs will undergo a substance abuse screening with a certified Drug and Alcohol counselor to determine if substance use or abuse is a concern. Students who are identified as having a history of substance use or exposure to a drug using peer culture undergo a comprehensive diagnostic substance abuse assessment. In addition to these assessments, the following substance abuse-related services are also available: individual therapy sessions; drug & alcohol education group therapy; sobriety group; family issues group; and referral to outside agencies.

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***If a parent/guardian has any questions or concerns regarding this portion of the evaluation process, please contact Dr. Giovanna Vitullo, Program Coordinator, at 847.680.8349 ext. 307***

**Other services available in these programs include:**

- ❖ Speech/Language Therapist ❖
- Psychiatric Consultation and Evaluation
- ❖ Occupational/Physical Therapy ❖
- Certified School Nurse on premises daily

## **GENERAL SCHOOL INFORMATION**

**SCHOOL DAYS & HOURS** *School Year* (August-May) Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Fridays 9:00am-3:00pm Thursdays 9:00am-2:00pm **Summer Term** (June & July) Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays 9:00am-3:00pm School doors open at 8:40am.

Classes are in session from 9:00am - 3:00pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; and from 9:00am - 2:00pm on Thursdays to accommodate staff in-service training. Students are expected to remain in their classrooms, monitored by CDS Staff, all day, unless otherwise directed.

**TRANSPORTATION** All students are provided door-to-door transportation by their home school districts. School rules and expectations are in effect from the time a student enters his/her transportation in the morning, through the time s/he is dropped off at home. Our school staff work closely with the transportation companies, and have daily communication with the drivers to ensure that students are behaving appropriately and are adhering to all mandatory safety guidelines. Students must wear their seat belts at all times while on the bus or cab.

**ATTENDANCE** Attendance is one of the biggest indicators of school success. Students who attend school regularly are naturally exposed to more than those who are routinely absent. Furthermore, absences can quickly add up. Our goal is to have every student present every day for every class. Our schools will do everything within our limited power to compel parents to get their child to school.

**EXCUSED ABSENCES** In order for an absence to be considered Excused, a parent/guardian needs to call the Front Desk **by 10 am** on the day of any absence. If attendance becomes an issue, a doctor's note may be required specifying the dates that the student's absences were excused, and the reason for absence. Students are not excused due to school refusal/anxiety.

**UNEXCUSED ABSENCES** An absence will be considered Unexcused when the student is not in attendance, and the above protocol has not been adhered to. In addition, a parent/guardian can call to let us know that, because of their child's poor decision making, his/her absence will not be excused. The home school district will be notified of unexcused absences, and school district officials will initiate contact with truancy officials if the absences become a concern.

**SUMMER TERM ATTENDANCE** Summer Term consists of 20 school days, and students are expected to be in attendance every day.

**HOMEWORK** If a student does not complete his/her homework or class assignments by the due date, the student's point sheet will be addressed for not being prepared and teachers will make parents aware of all late and missing assignments on the student's homenote. Students are expected to complete homework according to their teachers' specifications. Staff are here to help problem-solve issues with homework completion in order to promote student success.

**CHECK-IN** To ensure the safety of both students and staff, all students are searched prior to admittance into the school building. These searches are gender-specific (e.g., female staff search

female students and vice versa) unless otherwise stipulated by a student's individual transgender policy. Searches generally include the use of a metal detecting wand, emptying of pockets, removal of outerwear and shoes, and examination of all belongings. Random searches may also be conducted at other times during the school day if deemed necessary by school staff or administration.

**RULES, BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS** Our school community is based upon mutual respect, cooperation, generosity and courtesy. Positive behaviors such as politeness, thoughtful listening, participating in the classroom or group, ignoring poor peer behavior, and remaining on task will be rewarded with incentives that are meaningful to each individual student.

Inappropriate, negative, or otherwise disruptive behaviors will be addressed as immediately as possible and will bear the natural, logical consequences of making poor choices. These consequences will be individually tailored for each student, according to his/her specific needs and learning style.

**DRESS CODE** Students are expected to dress in such a way to bring pride to themselves and the school community:

- No short skirts or shorts – the length must be below the longest fingertip when standing
- No leggings or yoga pants, unless the length of the shirt over them is below the longest fingertip
- No spaghetti straps or strapless tops – straps must be at least 1-2" thick
- No exposed undergarments (bras, underwear, boxers, etc.)
- No low pants – pants are expected to be worn at, or just below, the waist
- No midriff exposure (even when one sits, stretches, bends down) – shirts must cover the entire torso
- No transparent/"see through" clothing
- No overly-tight or low cut garments
- No facial piercings that can result in injury (lip rings, tongue piercings, open gauges, etc)(small, single, nose stud is acceptable)

- Ear gauges must be plugged with full closure plugs (no open gauges, rings, etc)
- No visible tattoos or hickeys
- No torn clothing – with the exception of tears in pants that are below the the longest fingertip
- No hanging straps, buckles or chains on clothing
- No hooded sweatshirts, coats, scarves or bandanas
- No garments displaying alcohol/drug related advertising or implications; obscene or suggestive slogans; signs/colors/manner of wearing that could be gang related
- No hats
- No slipper or pajamas
- Student needs appropriate shoes for P.E. (gym shoes can be left at school)

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- Any clothing, piercing, make-up, jewelry, nail polish, etc. that is determined by staff to be disruptive to the educational process or unsafe is prohibited.

If a student is in violation of this dress code, s/he will be asked to turn clothing inside out, change, or remove certain items if found to be inappropriate by any staff member.

**FOOD** Students are not allowed to bring any food or drink items into the school building. This includes hard candy, gum, breath mints, etc. Students are provided with a nutritionally balanced, catered lunch and have access to fruit and snacks. Accommodations can be made based on dietary necessity, (e.g., diabetes). Students have access to water throughout the day.

**MONEY & PERSONAL BELONGINGS** Students do not need to bring money to school. If there is a field trip, parents will receive advanced written notification. If deemed appropriate by the teacher, parents may send spending money in a sealed envelope with the child's name and the amount enclosed, on the front. If a student chooses to bring money to school, they may not be in possession of more than \$10.00. Devices brought to school for use on transportation to and from school, must be used appropriately as indicated in the internet use/social media/communication

policy.

These, along with any other non-school related belongings, will be kept in a locked coat room, in their individual cubby, and will be returned to students at the end of the day. Students who do not follow these rules will be given one warning. Subsequent attempts to bring in excess money, unapproved devices, or items that are inappropriate for the school setting will result in these item(s) being confiscated and returned only to a parent or guardian. CDS does not allow students to trade, exchange or purchase belongings with/from other students.

**MOBILE PHONES & OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES** Mobile phones are not permitted on school property (including transportation) and will be confiscated. Other electronic devices may be permitted as long as there is no camera accessibility. Please see *Use of personal electronic devices* in the “Student Electronic Communication & Social Media Policy” of the STUDENT & PARENT HANDBOOK.

**LIVE ANIMALS** Students are not permitted to bring live animals to school without prior approval of the classroom teacher. Any animals brought to school without approval will be confiscated as soon as they are discovered and parents will be called to immediately pick up the animal.

**CONTRABAND** In order to promote a safe school environment, students are searched on a daily basis upon their arrival. The following constitutes a list of items/possessions which students are not allowed to bring into school: **1. Weapons of any kind**, or any instrument that could be construed as a weapon.

**2. Cigarettes, lighters and/or matches.** Smoking is prohibited on school grounds, including while a student is on his/her transportation to and from school.

**3. Sack lunches or other food or beverage items.** Organic, nutritionally balanced, hot lunch is provided by the school free of charge on a daily basis.

**4. Students are allowed to bring a maximum of \$10 to school.** Any amount over \$10 will be held by the front desk and returned at the end of the school day on the first offense. A subsequent incident will require a parent to come pick the money up from school.

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**5. Prescription Medications** – prescription medication that needs to be taken at school must be accompanied by the appropriate consent form provided. This requires both parental and physician signatures.

**6. Over-the-Counter-Medication** - the provided form must also accompany any pain relievers, allergy medications, cold medications, etc., in order to be brought to school. Students are not allowed to carry these medications loose in their pockets, purses, etc.

**ALCOHOL & DRUG POSSESSION AND/OR USE** Students are expected to be free from the effects of illicit drugs or alcohol use while in attendance. Students will refrain from bringing cigarettes, lighters, matches, tobacco products, vapes, e-cigarettes, pills, medications, and drugs or alcohol of any kind. If school personnel suspect that a student is under the influence, or in possession of an illegal substance or paraphernalia, the following options are available to our staff:

- Removal from the peer group
- Assessment of vital signs by nurse
- Assessment by school CADC
- Parental notification and possible request to pick up student from school
- Referral/transport to the nearest emergency room
- Police notification if necessary
- Referral for psychiatric treatment and/or hospitalization
- Referral for substance abuse evaluation/treatment
- Staffing with parents/guardians and home school district prior to re-entry

**THREATS OR ACTIONS THAT RESULT IN PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL HARM TO OTHERS** Students are expected to consistently demonstrate respect for others. The Connections Organization schools intends to provide a safe, nurturing, comfortable environment for all students and staff members. If a situation arises in which a student becomes threatening, is verbally cruel, harassing, sexually inappropriate and/or becomes physically aggressive in any way the following options are available:

- Immediate one to one behavioral and therapeutic intervention
- Removal from peer group
- Counseling for others involved in the

situation

- Peer mediation
- Parental notification and possible request to pick up student from school
- Police notification if necessary
- Removal from school
- Restitution activities for damage of property
- Staffing with school district and parents
- Assessment for psychiatric treatment/hospitalization

**GANG BEHAVIOR** Students may not wear, possess, distribute, sell, draw or display anything that could be interpreted as a gang sign or symbol. Students may not communicate gang representation verbally, or non-verbally with gestures, handshakes, etc. Students may not solicit others for gang membership through any means.

**INTERNET USAGE** Responsible use of the Internet is expected. Direct staff supervision is required. Please see the “Acceptable Use Policy for Internet Access” in the STUDENT & PARENT HANDBOOK.

## **DIAGNOSTIC PROGRAM AND EVALUATION Q&A**

Welcome to the Diagnostic Program! A Diagnostic Evaluation, which can take up to 60 school days, is used to help determine if your child is considered eligible for Special Education Services. Throughout this process, you as parents/guardians will be exposed to concepts and ideas you may be unfamiliar with. You will also be asked to make important decisions regarding your child's educational programming. This document is designed to help you navigate this process, answer questions you may have regarding certain processes and procedures, and prepare you for the Diagnostic Staffing which will take place at the end of the evaluation timeline.

**WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE DIAGNOSTIC EVALUATION?** Evaluating your child means more than the school just giving your child a test. The school must evaluate your child in all the areas where your child may be affected by a possible disability. This may include looking at your child's

health, vision, hearing, social and emotional well-being, general intelligence, performance in school, and how well your child communicates with others and uses his or her body. The evaluation must be individualized and as comprehensive as possible in order to determine if your child has a disability. If a disability is determined, the evaluation also aims to identify all of your child's needs for special education and related services.

The evaluation process involves the following steps:

❖ **Review existing information** A team of people, including you, begins by looking at the information the school already has about your child. You may have information about your child you wish to share as well. The team will look at information such as:

- Your child's scores on tests given in the classroom or to all students in your child's grade;
- The opinions and observations of your child's teachers and other school staff who know your child; and
- Your feelings, concerns, and ideas about how your child is doing in school.

❖ **Decide if more information is still needed** The information collected above will help the group decide:

- If your child has a particular type of disability;
- How your child is currently doing in school;
- Whether your child needs special education and related services; and
- What your child's educational needs are?

If the information the team collects does not answer these questions, then the school must collect more information about your child.

❖ **Collect more information about your child** Your informed written permission is required before the school may collect additional information about your son or daughter. The school must also describe how it will collect the information. This includes describing the tests that will be used and the other ways the school will gather information about your child. After you give your consent, the school will go ahead as described. The information

gathered will give the evaluation team the information needed to make the types of decisions listed above.

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**HOW DOES THE SCHOOL COLLECT INFORMATION?** The school collects information about your child from many different people and in many different ways as part of a case study evaluation.

A case study evaluation encompasses a series of in-depth multidisciplinary diagnostic procedures conducted within an established time frame and designed to provide information about your child and the nature of the problems that may affect his/her educational development. These components may include the following:

1. Psychological testing, including analysis of intelligence, achievement, social/emotional status and personality functioning
2. Classroom observations and teacher's report on academic progress
3. Social/Developmental History
4. Therapeutic Summary
5. Vision/Hearing screening and other reviews of relevant health history
6. Psychiatric Evaluation, if needed
7. Substance use screening and/or evaluation, if needed
8. Occupational therapy evaluation, if needed
9. Speech & language evaluation, if needed
10. Assessment of communication skills and motor abilities, if needed

While these assessments are an important part of an evaluation, they are only a part of the Diagnostic

Evaluation. **The evaluation should also include:**

- The observations and opinions of professionals who have worked with your child;
- Your child's medical history, when it relates to his or her performance in school; and
- Your ideas about your child's school experiences, abilities, needs, and behavior outside of school, and his or her feelings about school.

Your child's school district has utilized the SEDOL Diagnostic program and its staff to be the primary collectors of additional data on your child. Our program has up to 60 school days in

which to do this. Near the end of the 60-day time line the Diagnostic program will schedule a Diagnostic Staffing, which is a meeting comprised of parents/ guardians, home school staff, Diagnostic Program Staff, and any other relevant members of your child's Educational Team. During this staffing we will:

- Review all evaluation data
- Discuss your child's potential eligibility for special education services
- Write an IEP (Individual Education Plan) if needed
- Determine educational placement (the setting your child will transfer to now that the evaluation process is complete)

Please note that although the Diagnostic Program is housed within Connections Day School, participation in the Diagnostic program **does not guarantee placement in Connections Day School** if a private therapeutic day school setting is selected for your child.

**WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION?** Children with disabilities are eligible for special education and related services when they meet IDEA's definition of a "child with a disability" in combination with state and local policies. The

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Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides for special education services for children and youth, ages 3-21, with disabilities. It ensures each child receives a free, appropriate public education based on his or her individual needs, and it specifies 13 possible educational disabling conditions, including specific learning disabilities. It also guarantees a number of important rights -timely evaluation, access to all meetings and paperwork, transition planning, and related services -for children with disabilities and their parents or guardians. Most children with LD are served under IDEA.

#### ❖ **IDEA's Categories of Disability**

- Autism
- Deafness
- Deaf-Blindness
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
  - Other Health Impairment
  - Emotional Disability
  - Specific Learning Disability

- Speech/Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury

- Visual Impairment, including blindness

Within the Diagnostic evaluation process, we have observed that the most commonly determined eligibility categories identified are **Specific Learning Disabilities, Emotional Disabilities**, and/or **Other Health Impairment**.

**SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY (SLD):** Even though some three million school-age children are classified as having specific learning disabilities (SLD), this category of special need is often widely misunderstood. Surveys of both parents and educators confirm that many people mistakenly link SLD with mental retardation and disorders of mental health and believe that, left alone, children are likely to outgrow SLD over time.

The term specific learning disability refers to one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, and affects a person's ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

- SLD does not include problems primarily due to visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, although students with such diagnoses can also have learning disabilities.
- SLD does not include problems that result primarily from mental retardation or emotional disturbance, although, again, children who experience such difficulties can also have learning disabilities.
- SLD does not include problems that result primarily from cultural, environmental, or economic disadvantage.

Learning disabilities are real! Although they often aren't observed until a child is doing school-related tasks, a proven biological basis for SLD exists, including emerging data that document genetic links for LD within families.

"LD is the largest is the largest category of students receiving special education services" according to the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Among school aged children, learning disabilities affect an estimated 2%-5% of students.\*

"Learning disabilities are not a prescription for failure. With the right kinds of instruction, guidance and support, there are no limits to what individuals with LD can achieve." \* *Sheldon H. Horowitz National Center for Learning Disabilities*

\*Cortiella, Candace and Horowitz, Sheldon H. *The State of Learning Disabilities: Facts, Trends and Emerging Issues*. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014

**EMOTIONAL DISABILITY (ED):** Students who qualify for special education under this category have emotional difficulties that are significantly impacting the child's education. The child may or may not have a psychological diagnosis. A child with a diagnosis of anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or others may qualify under this category. However, someone with undiagnosed emotional problems may also qualify. Some believe that students with extreme behavioral problems should qualify under this category. That is not the case. A student can only qualify if it is determined that the behavioral problems are due to an Emotional Disability (ED).

An emotional disability is any 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:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

**OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENT (OHI)** Students who qualify for special education under this category have demonstrated limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened sensitivity to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that

- is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, or sickle cell anemia; and
- adversely affects a child's educational performance.

For more information regarding these categories as well as the other IDEA categories, please visit the Illinois State Board of Education website:

<http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/html/disability-areas.htm>. Students with ADD or ADHD who do not meet the eligibility criteria of Other Health Impairment or any of the specified disabilities may be entitled to the services and legal protections described in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 was the first federal Civil Rights Law to protect the rights of people with disabilities. It prohibits discrimination in:

1. The education of students with disabilities
2. Vocational education programs
3. College programs and other post-secondary education programs
4. Employment
5. Health, welfare, and other social service programs
6. Other programs and activities that receive federal funds

Section 504 requires an evaluation to determine whether or not your child meets the eligibility criteria. If found eligible, the school district is required to provide an appropriate

education. This may mean modifying the regular education program and providing any necessary supportive services (e.g., reducing the amount of required work, completing fewer assignments in a shorter period of time, providing more visual instruction, and/or developing behavioral interventions).

**WHAT IS AN IEP?** The IEP, Individualized Education Program, is a written document that's developed for each public school child who is eligible for special education. - The

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IEP is created through a team effort and reviewed

at least once a

year.

Before an IEP can be written, your child must be eligible for special education. By Federal Law, a multidisciplinary team must determine that (1) the child with a disability and (2) the child requires special education and related services to benefit from the general education program. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law, requires certain information to be included in the IEP but doesn't specify how the IEP should look. Because states and local school systems may include additional information, forms differ from state to state and may vary between school systems within a state.

The members of the multidisciplinary team who write your child's IEP may include:

- You, the parents/guardians, who have valuable insights and information about his strengths and needs and ideas for enhancing his education
- General education teacher(s) who can share information about classroom expectations and your child's performance
- A special education teacher who has training and experience in educating children with disabilities and in working with other educators to plan accommodations
- An individual who can interpret the results of your child's evaluation and use results to help plan an appropriate instructional program
- A representative of the school system who knows about special education services and has the authority to commit resources
- Individuals with knowledge or special expertise about your child that are invited by you and/or the school district
- Representatives from transition services agencies, when such services are being discussed
- Your child, when appropriate, and whenever transition is discussed

**CONTENTS OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)** The IEP is a document that is designed to meet your child's unique educational needs. It's not a contract, but it does guarantee the necessary supports and services that are agreed upon and written for your child.

At the least, the IEP must contain these pieces of information:

- Present Levels of Educational Performance
- Information about your child's strengths and needs as presented by teachers, parents, and the school staff who performed the evaluations.
- Comments will be made about how your child is doing in the classroom.
- Observations and results of state and district-wide tests and the special education evaluation, including individually administered standardized tests, are reviewed. Besides academic needs, any other areas of concern that have been identified, such as language development, behavior, or social skills, should be discussed, as well.

**GOALS:** The next step is to write measurable goals that the child can reasonably accomplish in one year. Goals are based on what was discussed and documented in present levels of educational performance and focus on his/her needs that result from the disability. Goals should help him/her be involved and progress in the general curriculum. These may be academic, social, behavioral, self-help, or they may address other educational needs. Goals are not written to maintain skills or help him/her achieve above grade level. The requirement for objectives and benchmarks -with which to measure progress toward goals -was eliminated from IEP requirements with the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. However, the law now states that the child's IEP must include "a description of how the child's progress toward the annual goals ... will

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be measured and when periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward annual goals will be provided" -for example, at the same time report cards are issued for all students.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES** Once the IEP is written, the team has to decide how to put it into action. The school district is obligated to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The IEP team considers the way to the maximum extent appropriate for both -to educate your child alongside students without a disability. Special education is a set of services,

rather than a specific place for your child to go. The services your child needs to reach the goals and objectives and how they'll be delivered are identified. For most students, the general education classroom will be the preferred setting, but a range of options is available, including special day classes.

**YOUR ROLE AS PARENTS/GUARDIANS:** Parents often feel overwhelmed when they attend an IEP meeting because so many people are there. The time goes by quickly, and you may feel rushed. Education jargon can be hard to understand, yet you're supposed to be a full participant in the meeting. Here are some ideas that may help to reduce your 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 say at the meeting.
- Prepare your thoughts before the meeting by writing down the important points you want to make about your child. If you'd like, ask to have your information included in your child's IEP.
- Take someone with you to serve as your support system. If a spouse or family member can't attend, ask a trusted friend to go with you. If you decide to bring a friend or advocate, you should inform the school so they are aware of whom you're bringing. Be prepared for them to question who the person is and why you have decided to include them in the meeting. The school should tell you if they have a specific policy on other attendees at the IEP meeting.
- Ask questions if you don't understand the terms being used. If necessary, arrange to meet with individuals after the meeting to review their statements or reports.
- Try to stay focused and positive. If anyone becomes frustrated or angry, ask to have the meeting continued at another date. It's hard to develop an IEP when emotions have taken over the process.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?** Written parent permission is necessary before the IEP can go into effect. If you agree with only parts of the IEP, let the school know so services can begin for your child. Once you sign the first IEP, you have granted your permission for the school to provide ongoing special education services for your child.

Although you may change your mind after signing the IEP and withdraw your permission, you should be aware that this action may have legal implications. (Consult with an advocate before taking this action.) Write a letter to the school that tells why you've changed your mind and which parts of the IEP you disagree with. Most likely, the school will want to hold another IEP meeting to discuss your concerns.

The IEP is reviewed at least once a year. However, if you or the teacher believes that your child isn't learning or making progress or if the student has achieved the goals sooner than expected, a meeting may be scheduled to revise the IEP. If you feel that an IEP review meeting is needed, put your request in writing and send it to the school and/or district administrator.

**EDUCATION PLACEMENT** Education placement determination will occur at the Diagnostic Staffing following all eligibility discussions. Your child must be provided an education - 14 - in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This

means that to the greatest degree appropriate, any student with a disability aged 3 through 21, in public or private institutions or other care facilities, is educated with children who are not disabled. Any separation of a student from the regular education environment (e.g., special classes, separate schooling) should take place only if the student's IEP team determines that the nature and/or severity of the student's disability is such that education in a regular classroom setting, even with the use of supplemental aids and services, cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Federal regulations require that the IEP team's first placement consideration should be a regular education setting with accommodations or modifications. However, this may not always be the most appropriate setting for your child. Educational placement decisions are based on your child's needs and may include the following locations. (Please note this is not an exhaustive list):

1. **Regular Education** – your child receives specially designed instruction with supplementary aids and services in the general education classroom.
2. **Regular Education with Social Work Support** – your child receives additional support from a social worker/counselor within the school setting for therapy sessions.
3. **Resource Room (Special Class)** – your child receives specially designed instruction through a special education class, while staying included in regular classes as much as possible.
4. **Self-Contained Room (Special Class)** – your child receives specially designed instruction in a special education class, while remaining in those parts of regular education classes, with support, where appropriate.
5. **Alternative Educational Setting** – your child receives specially designed instruction in a special school. These can be either public or private therapeutic day schools.
6. **Residential Programs** – your child receives specially designed instruction in a special school and lives on the grounds of that same school.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF MY CHILD IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION?** If your student does not meet criteria for special education, this will be documented in writing. This documentation will explain why your child has been found “not eligible.” If you are in disagreement with this decision, speak with your school representative about what options you have according to IDEA.

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Thank you for being an advocate for your child over the course of the Diagnostic Evaluation.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Diagnostic Coordinator of your student’s school with any questions about information pertaining to the Diagnostic Evaluation.

**Diagnostic Program at Connections Day School**

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