

## **GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM**

In this document you will find recommended [action steps](#) and [milestones](#) for implementation of the reform, [FAQs](#), [information for office staff](#) on enrollment of students with disabilities, and links to additional [resources](#).

As the special education reform scales up citywide in the 2012-13 school year, students with Individualized Education Programs (“IEPs”) will most likely be enrolled at their zoned school or a school of their choice, rather than being assigned to a school based solely on their program recommendation. Because your school will be required to fully meet the service mandates stated on all of your students’ IEPs beginning this fall, it is imperative that you take the necessary steps now to plan for the upcoming school year, so that services are in place and all incoming students and their families feel welcome at your school. It is also crucial that you share and discuss with your staff the plan that you develop, particularly as it relates to family interactions.

### **I. ACTION STEPS**

For your guidance, below are the steps to take between now and the first day of school, if you have not already done so:

#### ***1) Ensure your staff are ready to welcome families.***

- Office staff and anyone else who greets families should understand that students with disabilities should be welcomed to the school community. A [guide for office staff](#) at the end of this document is designed to help you inform staff members about the reform and their role in welcoming families.
- Given that it is the responsibility of the community school to meet the needs of each student, please ensure that no one in your school building informs the family that they will have to find another school, suggests that their child’s IEP will have to fit the school’s current options rather than the school adapting to serve the child, or implies that your school will not educate their child.
- If a child’s IEP recommends programs or services that your school does not currently have, you should make it clear to parents and students that they will still be welcomed into your school and that your school is committed to providing the programs and services that are recommended in the IEP, beginning on the student’s first day at your school.

## ***2) Establish and meet with your School Implementation Team (SIT).***

Your School Implementation Team (SIT) is a critical structure to facilitate the strategic planning and guidance necessary to ensure your school community is prepared to serve all students. The broad responsibility of the SIT is to develop and carry out an appropriate and effective reform implementation plan specific to your school community.

- The SIT does not need to be a new structure and may overlap with the Pupil Personnel Team (PPT) or other school teams. The principal can determine the membership profile that best meets the needs of the school.
- The SIT should include, at a minimum, one administrator and one to two additional staff members, ideally across general and special education.
- This team will be the liaison between your school and network for professional development, communication, and other topics related to implementation of the special education reform.
- For support in establishing a SIT and/or support in providing professional development for your staff, contact your [network special education achievement coach](#).

By the start of the school year, your SIT will be responsible for:

- Developing and documenting a plan for welcoming new families of students with disabilities, and reviewing the plan with key staff members who interface with parents registering new students;
- Communicating with your School Leadership Team (SLT), staff, and parents about the special education reform and your school's plans for implementation; and
- Creating and implementing a professional development (PD) plan for both general and special education teachers.

### 3) *Get to know articulating students with disabilities.*

- Set up a time to review each articulating student’s current IEP with his/her family as soon as possible. The purpose is to fully engage the parent or guardian in discussing the IEP and any other information about the student, including their strengths, needs, hopes, and fears with regard to transitioning to a new school, new classroom, and new teaching and support staff.
- In some circumstances the parent and school team may agree that the student’s needs may be best met through services different from those recommended on the existing IEP. In these cases, convene the IEP team—including parents and consistent with all [Standard Operating Procedures Manual \(SOPM\)](#) protocols, the tenets of LRE (Least Restrictive Environment)<sup>1</sup> and Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), and procedural safeguards—to develop a new IEP.
- Prepare to serve all students with disabilities on the first day of school. Make sure that you have explored all possible ways of serving the student, including, but not limited to reviewing certifications of teachers, reviewing space utilization, and maximizing teachers’ programs.
- If you have questions, utilize the support of your network [special education achievement coach](#).
- If your network team is not able to resolve issues related to program recommendations, budget, and staffing, they will escalate it to the cluster and central teams. Escalations will be considered based on existing resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Per the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), all students with disabilities who are eligible for special education must be provided a free, appropriate public education, or FAPE. This means they are entitled to specially-designed instruction and related services. Per IDEIA, these services must be provided in the Least Restrictive Environment, or LRE. This means that students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers “to the maximum extent appropriate.”

## II. MILESTONES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM IMPLEMENTATION

Starting Summer 2012

### Family Outreach

- Communicate with parents and families to share information on the special education reform. Parent coordinators may assist with this work. We ask that you share the [letter from the Chancellor and the one-page overview for families](#) over the summer or in your welcome back communications to families, if you have not shared it already.
- Host meetings and open houses for incoming students and families.
- Ensure that all currently-known parent complaints regarding placements and services are resolved by August 15.

### Operations

- Review teacher preference sheets and plan 2012-13 Table of Organization (TO).
- Adapt school program plans as needed to ensure incoming students are fully served according to their IEPs.
- Schedule your budget to align with programs for the new school year. For your reference, consult: [Fair Student Funding Guide \(p. 26\)](#); [Special Education Reform Reference Guide \(p. 5\)](#).
- Distribute staff assignments.
- Develop the 2012-13 school schedule, which will provide the structure for flexibly scheduling students.

### Professional Development

- Plan staff training for the professional development days prior to school opening.

## Before the First Day of School

### Preparing Your Staff

- Establish and meet with your School Implementation Team (SIT).
- Discuss the reform with your School Leadership Team (SLT).
- Thoroughly review IEPs for all incoming students.
- Share [reform guidance with office staff](#) so they are prepared to welcome new families.
- Launch 2012-13 professional development for school staff, including specific training on special education reform.
  - Professional development opportunities on topics such as IEP development, flexible programming, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), positive behavioral supports, collaboration and co-teaching.

## September and Ongoing

### Working with Families

- Register and enroll new students.
  - If a parent brings a student to register at your school, and the student has an IEP, they must be welcomed like any other student. Please ensure that your pupil personnel secretary, other office staff, parent coordinator, and anyone else who may interface with the parent are aware of this. Families may not be turned away because the student has an IEP.
  - Meet with the family, review the IEP, and discuss how you will meet the student's needs, develop a program if necessary, and provide supports which will provide the same level of support the student needs, as [outlined on p. 1](#). *Note:* Further guidance and protocols for students who enter your school “over the counter” is forthcoming.
- Remember: All students and families must feel welcome at your school. If you are not certain how to meet the needs of a particular student, get assistance from your network. If

additional support is needed, the network will employ the assistance of the senior instructional facilitator on the cluster team.

- SIT teams should look at the school's current continuum of services, and work with their network to expand that continuum and provide a broader range of service options as appropriate (e.g., if a school historically offered only SETSS, they may look to create a plan to provide indirect SETSS and ICT as well and align their PD and resource allocation to that arrangement).
- Monitor progress for all students with disabilities to ensure they are making adequate progress in the least restrictive environment. In consultation with families and following all protocols, make program adjustments as needed to ensure student success.

### **III. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS**

#### ***1) What should I do if students transfer in from outside of New York State?***

In this case, comparable service plans, agreed to by the IEP team, including the parent(s)/guardian/surrogate/student, may be created. Your network ASE can support in the development of these plans, if needed. The [SOPM](#) describes this process on page 139.

#### ***2) What if a student comes to my school but their IEP recommends a specialized program?***

The following programs are currently considered specialized and have set entrance criteria:

- *ASD Nest*—an integrated class setting (reduced class size) in community schools for high-functioning students on the autism spectrum.
- *ASD Horizon*—a self-contained class in a community school for students on the autism spectrum.
- *ASD Support*—an innovative program for supporting students on the autism spectrum in a community school.
- *Barrier-free*—a school building that is accessible to students who have limited mobility, serious health issues, or use a wheelchair, or other mobility device.
- *Bilingual Special Education*—a specialized program for students who speak Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Yiddish, or Haitian Creole, whose IEP mandates a bilingual special education program and/or services.
- *Specialized Program for Students with ID Classification*—a special class or program in a community school for students who are classified as intellectually disabled and who are being alternately assessed.
- *District 75 programs*

**Note:** *If a student has a program recommendation on his/her IEP for a specialized program, or if the student is in need of a barrier-free school and your school is not barrier-free, then the enrollment point person on your network team must be notified. Keep in mind that just because a student has an intellectual disability, is on the autism spectrum, or speaks a language other than English, does not automatically mean that the student requires a specialized program. Schools should use the content of the IEP as a guide until you get to know the student's needs more clearly.*

### ***3. What if I have a class, but it is not full?***

12:1 and 12:1:1 classes may have up to 12 students with IEPs. ICT classes can have up to 12 students with IEPs, and this number may not exceed 40% of the total number of students in the class. There is no minimum number of students for a special class, and you do not need to have 12 students in order to fund a teacher. Some variables are school-specific, so it is important that you work with your network budget liaison in order to ensure that you can meet the mandates of all of your students.

### ***4. What if I have only one student with a self-contained program recommendation?***

Welcome the family and let them know that you will work to provide the program recommended on the IEP. Review the IEP carefully and meet with the family to determine whether a self-contained class is needed for part of the day or for the full day and to ensure the student is in the least restrictive environment. If all members of the team, including the family, agree that a self-contained setting is needed, review your resources to determine how this group size can be provided within the context of your school community.

### ***5. What if my school does not currently have the resources to support a particular program recommendation?***

Please take the following steps:

- *Review resources and patterns of student need.* Schools may have available resources that can be used to implement the program. For example, if your school has three teachers providing SETSS and their schedules are below capacity, your school may be able to rearrange the provision of SETSS to allow for one of the providers to switch to providing self-contained services in accordance with the student's IEP. There may be other students in your school moving to less restrictive environments, thus freeing up teacher time or opening spaces in classes.
- *Work with your network.* If, after completing the steps above, the determination remains that the student requires a program that your school currently does not have and that your school does not have the resources to implement, work with your network team. Network operational and school-based special education team members will work with your school to identify programming options. In the rare circumstances when a situation is not resolved by your network, your network will work with the cluster team and central administration to ensure that your school has the resources to meet the mandated needs of your students.

***6. What resources are available for me to use to help prepare teachers and other school staff?***

Please see this [DOE Intranet page](#) for resources and training materials that you can use with your staff. This site will continue to be updated.

***7. What implementation resources are available for me, as principal?***

For information on the operational components of the reform, including budget and human resource questions, please review the [Special Education Reform Reference Guide](#). See the next page of this guidance document for additional resources.

#### **IV. INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL OFFICE STAFF ON SPECIAL EDUCATION ENROLLMENT (SPRING, FALL 2012)**

In order to ensure that all students are educated in the least restrictive environment that is academically appropriate, school teams will work to develop services and supports that minimize the impact of a student's disability and maximize the opportunities that each student has to participate in a general education setting. This means that a student might have different special education services during different parts of the day. For example, if a student needs more support in reading than in math, she may have different special education services for each content area or may not require special education services for math. This program of services and supports would be accurately reflected in her IEPs.

***What does this mean for schools?*** Beginning in September 2012, articulating students (in kindergarten, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade) or students new to a community will be able to attend the same schools they would attend if they were not recommended for special education. This can mean access to a student's zoned school or to a school of his or her choice.

If a parent brings a student who has an IEP to register at your school, he/she must be welcomed like any other student. *Families may not be turned away because the student has an IEP or has community school-level program recommendations that do not currently exist in your school.*

Check ATS and SESIS to verify that the student has an IEP in effect. You should do this routinely for every student that seeks enrollment at your school. Seek the assistance of the principal, assistant principal, and/or a programmer to ensure that the schedule you create for the student aligns with the recommended program.

If the IEP has a program recommendation for a program that you currently do not have (for example, 12:1 or ICT), take the following steps:

- 1) Ask the parent to please wait while you notify the principal or designee.
- 2) Notify the principal, assistant principal, or designee that a student who has an IEP is enrolling with a recommended program that the school does not currently have.
- 3) Allow the parent to complete all required documents for admission and enroll the student.

***Note:*** All students and families must feel welcome at your school. If you are not certain how to program a particular student, seek assistance from your principal, assistant principal for special education, SIT, or network coach.