

Horizons on the Hudson Elementary School

Newburgh, New York

IB, Primary Years Program

Special Education Policy

Special Education Philosophy

At Horizons on the Hudson, we maximize inclusion for all students with learning and/or special education needs. We strive to serve students in the Least Restrictive Environment in which they can achieve their maximum emotional, social, and academic potentials. We do not assign students to more restrictive settings without clearly answering the questions, "How will the more restrictive setting benefit this student? Do the benefits outweigh the costs of separating this student from his or her non-disabled peers?" When self-contained settings are necessary to meet students' needs, we collaborate to include students in grade-wide events such as projects, assemblies and trips and school-wide events such as shared meals and school-wide celebrations. We believe students with learning and/or special education needs should be held to the same rigorous standards as their non-disabled peers, with scaffolding and accommodations to support their success. We believe students with special education needs should be inspired to become world leaders beyond Academy Field. This links directly to our school and district vision, "Through the work of all, we will achieve inclusive excellence."

Policy Implementation

This policy of inclusion applies to all stakeholders in our community: administration, staff, parents, students, and community partners/guests. It will be communicated to stakeholders by:

- being included in a Special Education section in the staff handbook?
- being distributed to parents at the beginning of each school year?
- being included in our volunteer handbook and/or volunteer training session?

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Horizons Leadership Team and the School Psychologist, and necessary revisions will be made.

School Development

At Horizons, the philosophy of inclusion is promoted by the assistant principal (who is a national board certified special educator), the school psychologist, and the special educators on the Leadership Team. These individuals partner with other special educators, general educators, teaching assistants, and school-wide staff to ensure rigorous instruction and maximized inclusion for all students with learning and/or special education needs. These leaders also currently serve on the School Curriculum and School Climate committees to promote inclusion, accommodation, and differentiation of instruction. They advocate for increased levels of support and professional development offerings at the district level and mentor their ICT (Integrated Co Teaching) partners and Teaching Assistants as well as newer teachers to ensure that the special education philosophy is followed school-wide. To deepen our school wide awareness and understanding of the best practices related to teaching students with learning and/or special education needs, the special education leaders and teachers in the building will periodically offer professional development to the wider staff during staff meetings and/or PD days.

Resources

Our school has access to the expertise of our Assistant Principal, who is a Nationally Board Certified Special Educator, our full time school psychologist, and our senior Special Education Teachers. These individuals make themselves available to support staff, answer questions, serve on the RtI committee, and advocate for students and teachers of students with learning and/or special education needs. When the teachers from Horizons prepare IEPs and attend CSE (Committee on Special Education) meetings, we seek resources from the district to maximize inclusion in our building. We promote the expansion of the ICT program at Horizons and seek to establish programs for children that maximize inclusion and minimize pulling them out of the general education setting. Our school psychologist is trained in a wide variety of testing and screening tools, including the WISC-IV/WISC V, BASC-2 Parent, Self and Teacher Rating Scales, H-T-P, BEERY Visual Motor Integration, Bender Gestalt-II, WPPSI-IV, WJ-III Tests of Cognitive Abilities, WJ-III Tests of

Achievement, ABAS-II, Vineland-II, UNIT, and K-BIT 2. If a student requires bilingual psychological testing, our school psychologist alerts the district, and the district provides the appropriate personnel to conduct such testing. The Special Educators who perform educational testing use a variety of testing and screening tools, including the WIAT-III, the Woodcock-Johnson, and DIBELS. In addition, screenings and testing are available for Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Assistive Technology through the district. When CSE determines that a student at Horizons qualifies for one of these related services, the district provides personnel to deliver that service if it is currently not offered by a full time staff member in our building.

Our school is physically accessible for individuals with disabilities. We have an accessible bathroom as well as an elevator in the school.

Response to Intervention

At Horizons, the Response to Intervention protocols are a safety net meant to meet the needs of all our learners, promote inclusion, and decrease the number of unnecessary referrals made for Special Education Services.

Tier 1

At Tier 1, our teachers implement rigorous instruction aligned with the Common Core Standards and buttressed by differentiated instruction through small group teaching (such as guided reading), use of technology in the classroom to support multiple learning styles and individualization of approach, and a clear emphasis on the IB Learner Profile Traits to support the social and emotional growth of all learners. In grades 2-5, Tier 1 Math Fluency instruction currently includes adaptive software through Scholastic Fastt Math or a newer program called Reflex Math to support students in a differentiated manner in meeting the Common Core fluency standards for their grade level.

Tier 2

When a student struggles in the general education setting, the general education teacher is the first to begin to develop Tier 2 small group interventions within the classroom. The Academic Intervention Specialists are also available to provide such services. Horizons currently has two full time Reading Specialists who serve students in grades K-5 and one full time Math Specialist who serves 4th and 5th graders. These specialists coordinate with the classroom teachers and develop push-in or pull-out programs as are deemed necessary to meet the needs of each individual student. In addition, the Special Educators in the building often provide Tier 2 RtI supports to students. These currently include small groups for guided reading, Wilson Foundations, Wilson Reading, and Scholastic's System 44. Teachers track data on these academic interventions over the course of 8 weeks, evaluate their effectiveness, then begin a new 8 week cycle of intervention and evaluation.

When a student's struggle is with behavior or social/emotional growth, the classroom teacher is expected to develop an individualized behavior intervention plan for that student. Both the school's Assistant Principal and full time psychologist are available to support teachers in the development and implementation of such plans. For such systems, data should be collected and the effectiveness of the plan should be evaluated at pre-determined time intervals.

In addition, classroom teachers have the opportunity to refer students and families to the Orange County Mental Health Clinic housed at Horizons through the community partnership grant. The clinic provides talk therapy support and also assists families in linking with outside resources they may require. When unstable or insufficient housing is the reason a student is struggling in the general education setting, the classroom teacher is expected to alert the administration and contact William Morgan, the NECSD Homeless Liaison. When attendance issues are causing a student to struggle, classroom teachers are expected to fill out an AIR form and contact Carol Johnson-Cromer, NECSD Attendance Teacher, for the implementation of strategies and supports.

The RtI Team and Tier 3 Intervention

When, despite these levels of Tier 1 and Tier 2 support, a student's reading, writing, math, or behavior is consistently below grade level expectations, a student can be referred officially to the RtI Team so further analysis can be made and

additional interventions can be put into place. There is a specific form teachers must fill out to make this referral. Teachers are expected to attach the Tier 2 intervention data they have been collecting to the referral. Once the packet is accepted by the chair of the RtI team, a team meeting will be scheduled to discuss the student and establish interventions. Currently, the consistent team consists of the School Psychologist, the Assistant Principal, a Special Educator, the student's General Education Teacher, and the student's parent or guardian. As needed, the School Nurse, AIS Specialists(s) and or an ESL teacher will be invited to attend or provide a progress report to the team. When the team meets, the parent/guardian is notified ahead of time and given the chance to come in person. If the parent/guardian cannot attend in person, an attempt is made to include them by conference call and/or follow up call or meeting at a time that is more convenient for them. At each meeting, the team reviews data on the student, recommends interventions, sets achievement goals, and sets a time interval for meeting again. If, after a minimum of 3 meetings, the student is not showing adequate progress and a disability is suspected, the student may be referred to Special Education for a full evaluation.

The goal of the RtI process at Horizons is for all of us to take responsibilities as interventionists and create classrooms that are supportive of all types of learners so they can be successfully included in our curriculum and maximize their academic, social, and emotional potential in our school.

Child Identification for Special Education

When the RtI team has identified a student as a candidate for Special Education Testing, the classroom teacher fills out a referral packet, compiles the supporting documentation, and submits this to the school psychologist. The packet must include all the interventions implemented and the data tracking tools to go along with those interventions. The school psychologist submits the packet to Special Education, who then attempts to obtain consent for testing from the student's parent or guardian. At Horizons, we often support parents through this consent process by helping them obtain the consent form at the correct address and in the correct language and submit it signed in a timely manner. When consent is received, the school psychologist and a special educator are notified to begin psychological testing, educational testing, and a classroom observation. When this is completed, the school psychologist submits the results and the psychological testing report to Special Education. She also notifies the parent of the results and provides them with a copy before the initial CSE meeting. Special Education then schedules an initial CSE meeting, and the special educator creates a draft IEP in preparation for that meeting. During the meeting, the CSE team determines if the student qualifies for special education services under the IDEA. The CSE team typically consists of a CSE chair from the district, the school psychologist, a school administrator, a special educator, the student's general education teacher, and the parent/guardian. If the team decides a student qualifies for services, a special education program will be established at the meeting and the IEP draft will be discussed and refined. A target date for implementation of the IEP will be established, and that IEP will remain into effect until a program review or annual review takes place.

Guidelines for IEP Writing and Implementation

It is the responsibility of the student's case manager to draft an IEP for a student. This case manager may be a special educator, or, in the case of students who receive related services only, a related service provider. At Horizons, it is expected that a student's IEP will provide a clear and comprehensive analysis of how a student is doing in all academic areas, socially, emotionally, and physically. In addition to the WIAT-III educational testing, it is expected that classroom level data and information will be included to give a clear indication of a student's strengths and weaknesses. Parent input into the IEP should be sought out and included, and any parent concerns should be appropriately recorded. If the student receives any relevant evaluations, services or supports outside of the NECSO, these should be noted in the IEP. When academic and management needs are listed on an IEP, corresponding measurable annual goals as well as Supplementary Aids and Services/Program Modifications/Accommodations to scaffold students in succeeding towards those

goals must be indicated. Testing Modifications should align with the students' academic and management needs as well as their Supplementary Aids and Services/Program Modifications/Accommodations.

If the program determined by a CSE team requires that a student be transitioned to a new classroom or school, the CSE chair is responsible for communicating that information to the parent/guardian and assisting with the appropriate transportation changes as necessary.

Once an IEP is finalized, the district will notify the school psychologist, who will then print and file the IEP in the principal's office so that all the student's teachers and service providers can obtain access. The psychologist will also send a copy home to the student's parent/guardian. It is the expectation at Horizons that every teacher who works with a student will have read and become familiar with that student's IEP so that the individualized education program can be followed with fidelity throughout the day, including during special area instruction. The student's case manager will be ultimately responsible for overseeing the implementation of the IEP to ensure that it is being followed with fidelity.

If the parent/guardian or any teacher or service provider feels that a change needs to be made to the IEP, a program review can be requested at any time. If the parent/guardian is not the initiator of the program review, that person must be contacted and informed before the program review request form is filed. Once a program review has been formally requested, Special Education will schedule a CSE meeting.

Guidelines for Section 504

All students are protected by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Such students are those individuals who have a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities. The Board of Education of our district has appointed the school Assistant Principal to serve as the responsible party for managing 504 related cases, although there still remains a District Section 504 Coordinator. The school is charged with establishing a team comprised of a group of persons knowledgeable about the child and person/s familiar with the meaning of the evaluative data and program access options. The school will implement procedures to ensure the dissemination of the contents of a student's Section 504 Plan to the persons on the District's staff who will be charged with implementing the program, accommodations, related services and/or aids recommended. The school will also provide a copy of the official district 504 policy, at least annually, to all families of students residing in the District, at the time of a student's referral, prior to the student's evaluation or reevaluation, and prior to actions involving the educational placement of a student. The evaluating team will create procedures to ensure that each student who is believed to have a disability shall be evaluated prior to the provision of special education and/or related services and/or other reasonable accommodations and prior to any subsequent significant change in placement. Students who receive related services and/or other reasonable accommodations pursuant to Section 504. 7 are re-evaluated, at least once every three years. The team is to ensure that students who have a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities are placed and provided services, reasonable accommodations, and transportation necessary to afford each student a free appropriate public education.

Sample Accommodations Checklist:

Physical arrangement of room

- Sitting student near teacher
- Avoiding distracting stimuli

Lesson presentation

- Pairing students
- Providing visual aides
- Providing written outlines

Assignments

- Extra time to complete tasks

- Simplifying complex directions
- Reducing reading level of an assignment
- Providing structured routines

Test-Taking

- Allowing for open book assessments
- Giving exams orally
- Giving frequent short breaks

Organization

- Providing peer assistance with organizational skills
- Allowing student to have an extra set of books at home
- Sending daily/weekly progress reports home

Behaviors

- Using timers to facilitate task completion
- Praising specific behavior
- Allowing student time out of seat
- Extra privileges or rewards

Confidentiality

IEPs and all confidential information on students are held in locked locations in the building as follows: the school psychologist's office contains the folders of all students referred to the RtI team and Special Education in a locked filing cabinet; the central IEP copies are kept in the principal's office in a locked filing cabinet; the special educators may also keep personal copies of students' IEPs and testing information in locked cabinets in their classrooms/offices.

All teachers and service providers who work with a student are expected to sign out, read, and become familiar with the IEPs of all students they serve. If they have a further question about information regarding a student, they should seek information from the school psychologist.

This confidentiality policy will be included in the Staff Handbook. All teachers and teaching assistants in the school will sign a statement verifying they have read and understand the confidentiality policy.

Continuum of Services at HOH

Currently, Horizons supports students with Special Education Needs in the following programs on the continuum of services:

- General Education with Related Services
- General Education with Indirect/Direct Consultant Teacher Services
- General Education with Resource Room
- Integrated Co Teaching (Grades K, 1, 3, and 4; 2 ½ hours of services in each grade)
- Self-Contained 15:1 (Grades 3-5)
- Self-Contained 12:1 (Grades K-2)

Special Educators are assigned in the building to be Consultant Teachers, Resource Room Teachers, and ICT teachers. These special educators are responsible for collaborating with the general education teachers, Academic Intervention Specialists, and other staff working with students in delivering appropriate instruction and Supplementary Aids and Services/Program Modifications/Accommodations according to the students' IEPs.

In our ICT classrooms, in addition to having a special educator provide 2 ½ hours of services daily, a Teaching Assistant is assigned part or full time to each class to provide appropriate instruction to students with IEPs. They also assist the classroom teacher in providing Supplementary Aids and Services/Program

Modifications/Accommodations according to the students' IEPs. In such classrooms, the expectation is that the general educator, special educator and TA will work together as a team to design and implement instruction for all learners in the classroom community, including those with IEPs.

Because we believe deeply in inclusion and believe Integrated Co Teaching benefits all learners, our goal at Horizons is to offer Integrated Co Teaching as a full day program at all grade levels, K-5. We have been discussing this with Special Education, who is aware this is our goal.

Technology and Students with Learning/Special Education Needs

At Horizons, technology is an important part of what we offer all students in their daily instruction. Our technology specialist helps all staff use technology available in the building for the maximum benefit of all students, including those with special education needs. SMART Boards/ENO Boards, document projectors, laptop carts, cameras, and the computer lab are available to all classes and all students. If a student has special needs that require additional technology support, the students' teachers and/or service providers should bring that to the attention of the technology specialist and coordinate with the specialist to obtain the necessary support. In the past, such supports have included the System 44 software, keyboarding software, and voice to text recording software.

Accommodations for Assessment

When implementing students' IEPs, the accommodations for assessment must be followed in every classroom, including special area classrooms. During state and SLO testing, the Assistant Principal coordinates for the appropriate testing accommodations according to students' IEPs and 504 plans.

Gifted and Talented

Students at Horizons that have been identified as having exceptional academic capacity are provided with challenging instruction across all subject areas. Instruction is differentiated to provide appropriate enrichment opportunities. The learning is accelerated, yet connected and integrated in meaningful ways. Such environment is provided in order to ensure to develop the skills and knowledge commensurate with such students, to stimulate and develop the intellectual potential of gifted students by encouraging a growth mind-set, and to address the social and emotional concerns of gifted students by providing opportunities for positive relationships and group experiences with intellectual peers, yet still upholding the flexibility in collaborating across grade-level classrooms in order to maintain connectedness within the school community.

Conclusion

The instruction of students with special needs at Horizons-on-Hudson is continually evolving to meet the changing needs of students from year to year. The population of students with special needs ranges from the gifted and talented students enrolled in accelerated programs to those students with identified language and academic learning disabilities. The focus on instructing all students promotes inclusion through the differentiation of instruction to meet varied needs within a variety of classroom environments. Led by the shared expertise of professionals including the Assistant Principal, Psychologist and veteran special educators, special educators are encouraged to collaborate and evaluate with general education teachers to meet the needs of all students. The needs of special education students as documented through IEP goals and accommodations are considered for all assessment activities, and the RTI process is an ongoing effort to monitor student progress in the general education classroom. These clear yet flexible structures will allow us to truly inspire all students, including those with learning and/or special education needs, to become world leaders beyond Academy Field.