A Guide to Special Education Services in Berlin

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

From the time a student if first suspected of having a disability that interferes with his or her learning until the services are no longer needed or the student graduates, school personnel and parents work together in a partnership to share relevant information and to design an appropriate program for the student. This collaboration is essential to our work with students.

This guide is intended to provide you with a summary of the processes associated with special education as well as an overview of the continuum of special education and pupil personnel services in the Berlin Public Schools. Recommendations for students' programs are guided by the district's responsibility and commitment to providing instruction and related services in the least restrictive environment. Our focus is on having students acquire the skills they need to maximize their independence as learners.

We welcome your questions and comments as these will assist us in working with you to meet your child's needs. You can contact the staff or administrator in your child's school, or you may contact me at (860) 828-6581.

Sincerely,

Linda Holian

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Director of Pupil Personnel Services

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Department of Pupil Personnel Services of the Berlin Public Schools is to provide an array of services for individuals with special needs to develop skills that will enable them to live as productive citizens. To that end, the department will work collaboratively with families and the entire school community to plan and implement learning experiences that meet students' individual needs within the least restrictive environment.

OVERVIEW

Berlin Public Schools recognizes its responsibilities to find students with disabilities, to determine eligibility for special education services and to provide a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities within the least restrictive environment. Students aged 3 to 21 may be identified as eligible for services due to physical, emotional, medical, intellectual or learning disabilities, as well as impairments in vision, hearing or speech and language.

Berlin Public Schools provides a full range of special education and related services programs for students aged 3-21. These services include evaluations, development of an individualized education plan (IEP), specialized instruction to address areas of weakness, related services such as counseling or speech/language therapy if warranted, and teacher consultation. Professional development activities are provided to enable to staff to keep abreast of cutting edge information they need to provide quality instruction and services to students with disabilities.

Special education teachers, school psychologists, speech language pathologists, school social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapists and paraprofessionals provide services to students with disabilities in our schools.

THE REFERRAL PROCESS

Before a student is referred to the Planning and Placement Team, alternative strategies are explored and implemented within the student's general education classroom. Referrals for special education usually originate with a school study team. Referrals can, however, be made from a variety of sources, most often parents. Prior to submitting a referral for determination of a disability, teachers must show evidence of having provided a wide array of appropriate teaching strategies, curriculum interventions, and individualized teaching strategies. Students should be provided the opportunity to benefit from instruction through all tiers of the Scientific and Research Based Intervention process (SRBI).

Following a referral to special education, a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting is held where the student's teachers, parents, the building administrator, and the pupil personnel staff work as a team to review information about the student from previous records, data from interventions implemented in the school, and information from parents, teachers, physicians, and other relevant sources. A student may be observed and/or tested as part of the diagnostic, information-gathering process.

The Planning and Placement Team selects assessment tools to be used to identify the student's strengths and needs. When assessments are recommended they will be administered by more than one qualified professional.

Following the gathering of standardized and observational information, results are shared and recommendations for appropriate action are considered. This is done at a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting.

THE PLANNING AND PLACEMENT TEAM PROCESS

Parents are directly involved as participating members of the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) along with the student's general education teacher, a school administrator, and other members of the school team, such as the school psychologist, a speech/language pathologist, or other related services personnel depending upon the needs the student presents.

The role of the PPT is to determine the student's eligibility for special education and/or related services. When the student is found to be eligible, then the PPT develops specific goals and objectives for the student and designs a plan for how instruction and/or services will be delivered to facilitate achievement of the goals and objectives. All students eligible for special education and related services have a written Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed at the PPT. Parents are provided a written copy of the IEP which documents

special education and related services. These services are designed to be provided within the least restrictive educational environment for the individual student. Team members develop measurable long range goals and short-term objectives, and recommend criteria which will be used for evaluative purposes, as well as for exit from services.

Transition planning that focuses on student goals for post-secondary employment and/or education/training, and other skills necessary for as much independence after high school begins in preparation for a student's 15th birthday and is updated annually. Transition planning must include information about students' strengths and needs, their present levels of educational functioning, and their career interests. Transition planning documents the extent to which support will be needed by the student for post-graduate experiences in the realms of vocational experiences, independent living and leisure skills.

At age 18 due process rights are transferred from the parent to the student unless the student has been deemed incompetent by the court.

All students receiving special education and related services are reviewed at least annually at a PPT meeting to which parents are invited and encouraged to attend. All Berlin parents are informed of their due process rights at the annual review and provided a copy of the procedural safeguards document that is developed and approved by the State Department of Education. This document is also available online at the Berlin Public Schools website as well as at the State Department of Education website.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Special education instruction is available for students identified as disabled who are in preschool through grade 12 in the Berlin Public Schools. The disability <u>must</u> interfere with a student's school performance in order to qualify for special education and related services. Specialized instruction is provided by certified special education teachers and is directed toward meeting the needs as outlined in the student's Individualized Educational Program (IEP).

Berlin Public Schools is committed to the idea that students with disabilities are provided programs in the least restrictive environment along a continuum of special education instruction and related services provision. A variety of programs is available within the district. Programs are recommended by the school team based upon the student's educational needs as demonstrated by the data available to school staff regarding student performance.

In addition to working with academic skills, special education teachers also work toward helping youngsters to achieve goals in the domains of communication, social-emotional, behavioral, applied daily living, motor, pre-vocational and vocational skills. The purpose of specialized instruction is to make school a more successful experience for each student by teaching them strategies that maximize their independence in the skills that are integrated into the school experience and providing them access to the general education curriculum.

Occasionally, appropriate special education instruction within the Berlin Schools is not possible because of the nature or the severity of the disability. At such times, the PPT may recommend out of district placement.

RELATED SERVICES PROGRAMS

Psychological Services

School psychologists are available in each school. They provide counseling to student in individual and/ or group sessions. The purpose of the counseling is to enhance student's behavior and coping skills in the school setting to enable them to benefit from their educational program. School psychologists also conduct individual evaluations of students to assist the PPT in determining eligibility for special education. They consult with school team members to recommend strategies to enhance student participation in the educational program. Functional Behavioral Assessments are conducted by school psychologists and Behavior Intervention Plans are developed. The school psychologists also participate in PPTs and make recommendations regarding special services and/or programs.

Speech and Language Services

Speech-language pathologists provide assessment, analysis, and remediation that lead to improvement or correction of speech and/or language problems that interfere with a student's ability to benefit from the educational program. Services may include interventions to improve receptive and/or expressive language skill development, speech, voice or fluency work, feeding and oral motor programs, and consult with parents, teachers, and other school personnel.

Social Work Services

The school social workers serve as mental health consultants in the school system. They direct service toward the strengthening of a student's adjustment to the educational process. Included in these services are ongoing interaction with parents and counseling with students, analysis of behavior, referral to and liaison with community agencies, crisis intervention, and consultation with teachers and administrators to promote positive mental health and growth for all students. The social workers participate in PPTs, develop Behavior Intervention Plans and make recommendations regarding services or programs.

Occupational Therapy Services

Occupational therapists provide services to students with motor, cognitive, sensory-integrative and/or learning disabilities which interfere with educational programming. Direct services include screening, evaluation, intervention planning and implementation, and providing adaptive equipment. Recommendations for assistive technology may also be indicated. Occupational therapists also consult with school team members and participate in PPTs when the student's needs require this.

Physical Therapy Services

The physical therapist provides services to students with motor, cognitive, neurodevelopmental and/or learning disabilities whose functioning within the school setting is compromised. Direct services include screening, evaluation, intervention planning and implementation, and providing adaptive equipment. Physical therapists also consult with school team members and participate in PPTs when the student's needs require this.

School Counseling Services

School Counselors assist students in grades K-12 in identification and development of their interests and aptitudes. They help each individual student to become self-motivated and to make appropriate decisions about school careers and life goals. Individual counseling is provided. In grades K-12 School Counselors assist staff and others to develop pre-referral strategies when students are experiencing difficulty. They file PPT referrals for staff and sometimes parents. The school counselors also participate in PPTs and sometimes lead §504 meetings. They assist in the planning process for students who require special education and related services and in developing accommodations for §504 eligible students.

STAFF COLLABORATION

The Berlin Public Schools recognizes the importance of communication among professional staff who work with students requiring special education and related services. The administration shall make provisions for personnel who provide special education and related services and those who provide general education to collaborate with each other, other personnel and parents at the start of the school year and during the school day as necessary.

SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION

Special transportation is provided via PPT recommendation for students who require this service due to their disabilities and/or program locations. Transportation is provided in accordance with state law regarding transporting children. Safe transport is the district's goal at all times.

Each student is expected to be aware of the rules for riding school vehicles and to act accordingly. The driver will report all safety and behavior violations to the school principal.

HOMEBOUND INSTRUCTION

Home instruction is available to students when:

- a physician indicates that the student is unable to attend school for medical reasons;
- 2. the student's disability is so severe that it prevents the student from learning in a school setting; or
- 3. the student is pregnant or in a post-partum period; or
- 4. it is recommended by the Planning and Placement Team pending placement in a special education program; or

When a condition causes the student to be absent for at least three weeks and nothing in the condition precludes instruction, as certified by a physician, home instruction shall be provided after two weeks' absence.

Forms by which parents may apply for homebound instruction are available in the principal's office or guidance department of the child's school, or through the PPS Office.

Instruction may be provided in the school, hospital, home or public building, at the discretion of the school district. A tutor will never work in the home without a parent or quardian present.

Parents having questions relating to homebound instruction may call the Office of Pupil Personnel Services at (860) 828-6581 for further information.

EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR SERVICES (ESY)

When the PPT is discussing a student's eligibility for ESY the following factors must be considered:

- The nature or severity of the student's disability (nonregression);
- The student is likely to lose critical skills or fail to recover these skills within a reasonable time as compared to typical students (regression/recoupment);
- The student's progress in the areas of learning crucial to attaining self-sufficiency and independence from caretakers (nonregression);
- The student's stereotypic, ritualistic, aggressive or self-injurious interfering behaviors prevent the student from receiving some educational benefit from the program during the school year (nonregression); or
- Other special circumstances identified by the IEP team such as: the ability of the student to interact with other non-disabled students; the areas of the student's curriculum that need continuous attention; the student's vocational needs; or the availability of alternative resources.

The provision of extended school year services is the exception and not the rule for students receiving special education and related services. Extended school year means services provided beyond the length of the regular school year as described in the IEP and is provided at no cost to the parents. Eligibility for ESY must be determined each year for individual students who may be eligible to receive these services.

The determination of whether or not a student will be eligible for an extended school year program and the content and location of the program are generally discussed at the annual review for the student. This should be done early enough and a program of services offered to allow sufficient time for any dispute regarding the provision of the services to be resolved before the start of the extended school year program.

EDUCATION RECORDS

Special education records are considered confidential material available only to the parent or to the student at age 18 if he or she has not been deemed incompetent and to those staff members of the school system who have a legitimate educational interest in the student. Each individual who views the student's record must sign an access record disclosing the intent of their use of the record. Confidentiality of personally identifiable information is safeguarded at collection, storage, disclosure, and destruction stages.

Parents shall, upon written request, have access to all official records relating to their child as well as records used as a basis for referral. A record of access is maintained by the school.

One free copy of the records will be provided to the parent(s) within ten days of a written request or within 3 days when preparing for a due process proceeding.