



**Ashland Public Schools
Office of Student Services:
Special Education**

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Student Identification

Community Outreach:

Ashland Public Schools is dedicated to reaching out to the community to identify students who might be eligible for special education intervention. Our Child Find activities include yearly publications in the local newspaper outlining the process for having a three or four year old child screened and/or evaluated for special education services. Further, we also attend Early Intervention Open Houses, and advertise on our preschool webpage information for parents who might have concerns regarding their child's development.

Each school has a Response to Intervention (RtI) team comprised of educators, specialists and building administration who meet regularly to discuss individual student achievement. The RtI team in each building discusses students who are not meeting anticipated benchmarks in their skill acquisition (either developmental skills, or academic achievement), and to then suggest accommodations or interventions designed to target skill development. Accommodation strategies may be taken directly from the Building Accommodation Plans (BCAPs), a binder of recommended practices and accommodations designed to elicit optimal student performance. It is also the RtI teams' responsibility to maintain data collection of the accommodations and interventions offered and follow up with data analysis to determine if these accommodations and interventions are successful. Through the early intervention, frequent progress measurements and increasingly intense research based accommodations and instruction, the RtI process seeks to prevent academic failure and over-identification of a special education disability.

Parent Referral:

Students may be referred for special education evaluation by their parents or another adult who is involved with the child in a care-giving or professional capacity. The request for evaluation may be made to the

student's teacher, or building administrator, and typically the teacher or administrator will request the parent to write a quick note or letter explaining their concerns and outlining the request for an evaluation. When a request is received, the special education team chairperson is immediately notified and responds to the parent in a prompt and timely manner (within 5 school days) in order to seek consent for an evaluation. Although the Office of Student Services prefers to explore all appropriate RtI interventions ahead of a special education evaluation, it is not acceptable to delay responding to a parent's request for evaluation. The only time the district might refuse to conduct an initial special education evaluation is when it is clear that there is no suspicion of a disability and no concern for the student's development. In such cases, parents are provided with a detailed narrative of the district's reasons for refusal, and provided with the Notice of Procedural Safeguards from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and advised of their rights to appeal the school's decision.

When a request for testing is received and parental consent for evaluation signed and returned, the district will immediately begin the process of evaluating the student. Within thirty school days the evaluations will be completed, and within 45 school days the initial eligibility team will convene. Parents are invited to participate as full and equal members in the initial eligibility team meeting with the district staff. The student and other interested adults may also participate in team meetings (as appropriate and agreed upon). Notice for team meetings is provided to parents with sufficient time to support their participation, and we make every effort to have parents in attendance at their child's team meetings, including offering conference calls. All school notices sent to parents will clearly identify the nature, purpose, time, location and participants of the meeting. Throughout this process, the information which parents provide and/or concerns they express are carefully and respectfully considered by the team.

School Referral:

The building administration is responsible for promoting best teaching practices that are responsive to the diversity of learning styles, and range of academic and social skill development of the students within their school. Such instructional support may include remedial services, accommodations,

and individual intervention plans for students, as well as consultative and professional development to staff. Each school has a Response to Intervention team which meets regularly to brainstorm and problem-solve methods to assist students who are experiencing some difficulty in the general education setting. Supports and accommodations are considered and provided. The RtI team documents the student's response to the newly implemented accommodations and/or interventions. If however the student fails to make anticipated progress, the RtI team will make a referral for the student to be referred for special education evaluation.

District Procedure for Evaluation

Referrals are received by building administration, team chairs and the Office of Student Services. All received referrals must be responded to in a timely manner. When the referral stems from the RtI team, it is accompanied by data on the current performance of the student, accommodations offered, interventions offered and the outcomes on student performance. When the referral for testing stems from a parent concern, it must be put into writing (a simple note or letter or email from the parent).

The team chair receives the requests for testing and attempts to gather any missing data, such as focus of concern from parent or school staff. They must also generate a Referral for TEAM Evaluation form which is sent to the Office of Student Services. This form provides necessary student identification, reasons for testing request, and areas to be assessed. Within five school days, the Office of Student Services secretary will send out to the parent a District Proposal Letter (N1 or N2) and Consent to Test permission form. An N1 District Proposal Letter is a statement identifying the district's proposed action (in this case, testing) while an N2 District Proposal Letter is a statement identifying the district's refusal to act (in very rare cases a refusal to test). No testing can be conducted without parental consent and/or determination to do so through a BSEA process (for re-evaluations only).

When consent is returned to the Office of Student Services the secretary will complete a work order form and electronically send it to the team chair and the identified staff members who will need to complete testing. The work order form will identify the regulated timelines as well (thirty school days to complete testing, 45 school days to convene eligibility team meeting). It is the responsibility of the team chair to make sure that the staff members complete their testing. Currently the Office of Student Services is working to create a "master calendar" that identifies the team dates for all current students' annual and three year re-evaluation team

meetings during the summer so that only initial eligibility team meetings and unanticipated team meetings would need to be scheduled.

Evaluation Process and Eligibility Determination

Consent for Evaluation:

Ashland Public Schools seeks written parental consent before conducting an initial evaluation and /or three year re-evaluation and before initiating or changing services, specialized instruction and/or programmatic placement of any student. The special education team chairperson will notify the special education secretary by submitting a completed Referral for Team Evaluation form. The special education secretary will then generate an N1 Proposal for Evaluation and consent form request which is sent to the parents. Parents must sign and return the consent form indicating their consent for the recommended evaluations. Procedural Safeguards are also sent to the parents so that they may understand their due process rights and the means to resolve disputes with the district.

Types of Assessments:

Ashland Public Schools utilizes a variety of assessment tools when conducting an evaluation with a student. Assessments typically include formal and informal measurements and observations. Formal assessments are completed by appropriate members of the district staff who hold appropriate state and/or national certification and who have completed training in their area of expertise. A majority of the assessment tools are criteria-based/norm-referenced tests appropriate to determining aptitude and achievement levels. Such standardized measures are professionally judged to be technically sound, validated, and free from cultural and linguistic bias. Additionally, appropriate testing instruments are used to assess sensory, motor, and/or language skills.

All assessments are conducted by appropriately credentialed staff according to state guidelines. Cognitive/psychological evaluations are completed by the school psychologist, achievement evaluations are completed by the school psychologist and/or special education teacher, and speech and

language, occupational and physical therapy evaluations are completed by the relevant specialist. Each specialist will determine which evaluation tools will provide the best information to the eligibility team regarding the areas of concern that preceded the testing process.

Team Meeting:

Evaluation results are provided in a written report available to the parents, upon request, two school days before the eligibility team meeting. All reports contain a statement of which assessments were utilized, an outline of the testing procedures, the results of the assessment, and diagnostic impressions and recommendations.

The evaluation team is made up of the child's parent(s) or guardian(s), the student (if age 14 or older), the special education teacher, the regular or general education teacher, and any other person who has relevant information for consideration for the team meeting. Parents are welcome to bring a family friend, advocate and/or legal representative to any team meeting. The district requests advanced notice from parents of any invited team members so that we may plan for appropriate space, time and if necessary, legal representation, for the team meeting. The team meeting is chaired by the special education team chairperson for the child's grade. The team chairperson has the authority to facilitate an annual, initial, re-evaluation, placement or manifestation team meeting. Further, team chairpersons have the ability to fully commit the resources of the district.

The team's major function is to review a student's current performance, the results of all assessments, and the information provided by the family and/or community resources, and together determine: one, is there evidence of a disability, and two, does the student require specialized services and/or instruction in order to make adequate gains and effective progress within the general education environment. The team is further compelled to consider services and instruction in the least restrictive setting. If the team agrees that there is evidence of a disability and the student requires explicit instructions and/or services, the team will work together to draft an individualized educational plan for the student's success in the least restrictive setting and paid for by the district.

There might be occasion when the district seeks with parental consent to excuse a member of the team from full participation at the team meeting. In this event, the team member who is being excused is excused because they either do not have relevant data and information to share at the team, and/or have presented their information to the parents and provided written information to the team for consideration. Any excusal of a team member must be agreed upon by the parents, and a team excusal form signed by the district and parent (refer to Appendix B-Forms).

A child's parents are considered essential to the overall success of the team process. The district will make every effort to support parental participation in their child's educational planning and programming. Team notices will be sent home approximately one month before any scheduled team meeting noting the purpose, date, time and location of the team meetings. A reminder call will be made a few days before the team meeting, and consideration will be given to unique scheduling needs. However, there are rare occasions in which parents are unable to participate in the team meetings, and on these rare occasions, the district will have the appropriate staff member phone and/or email the parents to provide a follow-up of the information shared and determinations made at the team meeting.

Eligibility Determination:

Ashland Public Schools' team chairpersons have the necessary education, certification and training in regulatory practices and procedures for facilitating team determinations for special education eligibility according to state and federal guidelines. These due process procedures are followed to the best of our ability, and eligibility determinations and the development of the individualized educational plan is completed at the team meeting. This requires that the team review the mandated eligibility flow chart referencing the list of current disabilities with their corresponding state and federal definitions and criterion for identification. If there is evidence of a disability, a lack of progress as a result of the disability and the need for specialized instruction or related services, the team will determine that the student is eligible for special education and will develop an IEP for appropriate services and supports. Parents should leave the meeting with a clear understanding of their child's disability, and the proposed next steps. Following is the list of disability categories with their definition

Specific Learning Disability:

The determination of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) requires an observation of the student in the general education classroom, and evaluation reports must document clear discrepancies in functioning as determined through assessment or documentation within the student's history of persistent "resistance to instruction" after repeated attempts to improve the students' level of academic functioning. Federal law 34 CFR 300.7 states that a specific learning disability is defined as follows:

- (i) *General.* The term means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written that many manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell , or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia.
- (ii) The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Further, 34 CFR 300.541 sets criteria for determining the existence of a specific learning disability as follows:

A team may determine that a child has an SLD if the child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more key areas if provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels. If the team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between his/her intellectual ability and achievement in on or more of the following areas, the team may determine that the child has a specific learning disability.

- Oral expression
- Listening comprehension
- Written expression
- Basic reading skill

- Reading comprehension
- Mathematical calculation
- Mathematical reasoning

The district has authority to use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as part of the evaluation procedures (RtI).

Autism:

The definition of autism is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction. Federal law 34 CFR 300.7 states:

- (i) Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affect a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance.
- (ii) A child who manifest the characteristics of "autism" after age 3 could be diagnosed as having "autism" if the criteria in paragraph I (1) (i) of this section are satisfied.

Developmental Delay:

The determination of a developmental delay may be considered when a child under the age of nine shows gaps in achievement in a variety of areas. Federal law 34 CFR 300.7 states that developmental delay may be used in cases wherein "the learning capacity of a young child (3-9 years old) is significantly limited, impaired, or delayed and is exhibited by difficulties in one or more of the following areas: receptive and/or expressive language;

cognitive abilities; physical functioning; social, emotional, or adaptive functioning; and/or self help skills.”

Intellectual Impairment:

Intellectual impairment designations are made when the permanent capacity for performing cognitive tasks, functions, or problem solving is significantly limited or impaired and is exhibited by more than one of the following: a slower rate of learning; disorganized patterns of learning; difficulty with adaptive behavior; and/or difficulty understanding abstract concepts. Such terms shall include students identified with “mental retardation.” (34 CFR 300.7)

Sensory Impairment:

The designation of a sensory impairment shall, according to 34 CFR 300.7, include:

- (i) Hearing-The capacity to hear, with amplification, is limited, impaired, or absent and results in one or more of the following: reduced performance in hearing acuity tasks; difficulty with oral communication; and/or difficulty in understanding auditorally-presented information in the education environment. The term includes students who are deaf and students who are hard-of-hearing.
- (ii) Vision-The capacity to see, after correction, is limited, impaired, or absent and results in one or more of the following: reduced performance in visual acuity tasks; difficulty with written communication; and/or difficulty with understanding information presented visually in the education environment. The term includes students show are blind and students with limited vision.
- (iii) Deaf-Blind- Concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes severe communication and other developmental and educational needs.

Neurological Impairment:

Neurological impairments are diagnosed when the capacity of the nervous system is limited or impaired with difficulties exhibited in one or more of the following areas: the use of memory, the control, and use of cognitive functioning, sensory and motor skills, speech, language, organizational skills information processing, affect, social skills, or basic life functions. The term includes those who have suffered traumatic brain injury.

Emotional Impairment:

As defined under 34 CFR 300.7, the student exhibits one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects 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 feeling under normal circumstances; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The determination of a disability shall not be made solely because the student's behavior violates the school's discipline code, because the student is involved with a state court or social service agency, or because the student is socially maladjusted, unless the team determines that the student has a serious emotional disturbance

The term emotional disturbance is defined as follows:

- (i) A 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 generally pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression

- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- (ii) The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

Communication Impairment:

The capacity to use expressive and/or receptive language is significantly limited, impaired, or delayed and is exhibited by difficulties in one or more of the following areas: speech, such as articulation and/or voice; conveying, understanding, or using spoken, written, or symbolic language. The disability category may include a student with impaired articulation, stuttering, language impairment, or voice impairment if such impairment adversely affects the student's educational performance.

Physical Impairment:

The definition of a physical disability is the capacity to move, coordinate actions, or perform physical activities is significantly limited, impaired, or delayed and is exhibited by difficulties in one or more of the following areas: physical and motor tasks; independent movement; performing basic life functions. The terms shall include severe orthopedic impairments or impairments caused by congenital anomaly, cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures if such impairment adversely affects a student's educational performance.

Health Impairment:

A chronic or acute health problem such that the physiological capacity to function is significantly limited or impaired and results in one or more of the following; limited strength, vitality or alertness including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli resulting in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment. The term shall include health impairments due to asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit with hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead

poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia, if such health impairment adversely affects a student's educational performance.

The agreement that there exists a disability is the first step in the eligibility team process. The second step, equally important, asks each team member to decide if the student is making adequate educational progress and if not, is the lack of progress a result of the student's disability. At times, other factors may interfere with a student's performance, such as not completing work, being absent, or not being motivated to perform well and these factors are not associated with the student's disability.

The final step in the eligibility process is a determination for the need for specially designed instruction. This may include accommodations/services not afforded to other students that affect content, delivery of instruction, methodology, and/or performance criteria and are necessary to assist the student in participating and learning. Related services necessary to access general education curriculum **are** considered specially designed instruction. However, accommodations alone **are not** considered special education services, and would more appropriately be provided through regular education and potentially under a 504 Accommodation Plan.

An eligibility team may conclude with one of the following recommendations for next steps:

- Finding of special education eligibility and the drafting of an educational plan
- Finding of special education eligibility , and the request for additional testing (with a partial or full IEP), known as an extended evaluation
- Finding of no special education eligibility
- Finding of no special education eligibility but with a recommendation for a 504 Accommodation Plan

Extended Evaluation:

A team may conclude that a student is eligible for special education services but wish to obtain more information through further evaluations. In this case, the desire to evaluate further may not be used to extend the timelines for required assessments, to deny programs or services to a student, or

constitute a temporary placement for that student. Further, the team must identify the type of information through evaluation is needed to more fully understand the student's needs and profile as a learner, and the district must generate a new consent to test (N1 and N1A) form for parental permission.

Independent Educational Evaluation:

Parents should be asked if they agree with the evaluation process and findings. It is the district's obligation to provide a comprehensive evaluation in all areas of the suspected disability. If parents disagree with the district's evaluation, they have the right to an Independent Educational evaluation (IEE). Under federal and state law, if parents request an IEE at public expense, the district must either pay for the IEE or, within 5 school days, request a determination from the Bureau of Special Education Appeals that the district's evaluation was comprehensive and appropriate. The parents' rights to request an IEE is not limited to any particular timeframe. However, if the parent requests an IEE long after the district evaluation or if there is a significant change of circumstances since the district's evaluation, the best practice would be for the district to determine whether its own assessment information may be out of date, and if so, seek the parents' consent for the district to conduct its own updated assessments of the student first (within the regulatory timeframes). Further, under Massachusetts law, districts are required to provide publicly funded IEEs on a sliding scale fee for students whose families meet certain income criteria, as long as the IEE is in an area already assessed by the school and the request is received within 16 months of the schools' evaluation. Requests that fall within this entitlement are not subject to the BSEA Hearing Process. Parents may obtain an IEE at their own expense at any time. Whether the IEE is funded by the district or the parents, when the district receives an IEE, a team meeting must be convened within 10 school days to review the evaluation and any impact on educational planning must be discussed.

Individualized Educational Program

The Team Meeting:

Generally, a student's team meeting will include the following members:

- Parents
- Student (if over the age of 14)
- General educator
- Special educator
- Related service provider (as appropriate)
- Anyone who has knowledge/expertise of the child (as appropriate)

IDEA 2004 allows some members of the team to be excused if their presence is not needed at the team AND the parent agrees to excuse that member's presence. A form will be presented and signed by both the district representative and the parent/guardian to indicate consensus.

Parents/guardians are invited to bring anyone to their child's team who can help the team consider and plan for the most appropriate supports and interventions for the student. The district expects parents to inform us of any guests to the team meeting. Further, if parents seek to have legal representation at the team, which is their right, the district requests 48 hour notification in order to contact our counsel and arrange for their presence if appropriate.

Ashland Public Schools is committed to the concept of collaboration and the team effort is the vehicle for creating the best possible plan for supports and services for our students who qualify for special education services. We strive to maintain respect for all team members and to allow all members of the team an opportunity to voice their concerns, thoughts and solutions. Every year we send out a parent satisfaction survey so that we may gather feedback and continue to monitor our practice and procedures. If at any time the team process is confusing and/or problematic, we welcome team members to contact the Office of Student Services and discuss the concerns. Further, parents have procedural due process protections and may contact the Bureau of Special Education to discuss their concerns.

IEP Development and Implementation:

Once a team finds a student eligible for special education services, the process of developing an individualized educational program begins. The following elements are vital discussion points for the team:

1. Parent/student concerns
2. Student strengths and key evaluation findings
3. Present levels of educational performance
4. Team vision for the student's future
5. Necessary accommodations
6. Specifically designed instruction
7. Goals and benchmark objectives
8. Service Delivery
9. Nonparticipation justification (why a student may be outside of the general education setting)
10. State and district-wide assessment accommodations
11. Schedule modification
12. Transportation
13. Transition planning
14. Other concerns such as collaboration with community based agencies/providers

All areas of the IEP should be discussed. At an initial and re-evaluation team meeting, an IEP may take a bit of time to draft. However, at annual reviews or in some unique cases of a re-evaluation team meeting, the district may come to the team meeting with a draft of the IEP. When this occurs, the chairperson discusses the ideas included in the draft, allowing for edits or revisions as appropriate from the team discussion. At the team meeting, the parents, student, and other members of the educational team are encouraged to express their ideas about academic, developmental, and functional needs of the student, taking into consideration the student as a learner, a friend, family and community member, and as an increasingly independent person seeking personal fulfillment.

The Administrative Data page contains the student specific identification information, parental contact information, and liaison and school assignment

information. It is critical that at every team meeting this information is reviewed for accuracy.

IEP page one contains the parent/student concerns, the key evaluation findings, and the team vision for the student. Parent/student concerns may be presented verbatim or summarized. Usually, these concerns guide the team's focus of interventions and supports. However, at times parental/student concerns cover areas not included in educational planning. If parents/students insist on including such concerns, they will be added as a direct quote. Key evaluation findings and current performance contains a synopsis of the critical evaluation findings, written in parent friendly language, a statement of student strengths, interests, and accomplishments, and a summation of performance in the general education setting. This section should also include MCAS/district-wide assessment results, achievement towards goals, and explanation of progress to date.

IEP pages two and three, the Present Levels of Educational Performance (in the general curriculum and other educational needs) documents the impact of the student's disability and the necessary accommodations required for progress. Further, there is notation and explanation about specially designed instruction, content, methodology and performance criterion outlined in these two pages.

IEP page 4 documents the current performance levels and goals/objectives for the student. Usually, an educational plan has no more than 3-5 goal areas and reflects the areas impacted most by the student's disability. The current performance connects directly with the goal and objectives.

IEP page 5 is the service delivery grid. All services are reflected in the grid. The "A" grid reflects consultation services, the "B" grid reflects services within the general education setting, and the "C" grid reflects services outside of the general education setting.

IEP page 6 covers a section called "Nonparticipation Justification" which explains the reasons why it is necessary for a student to receive services outside of the general education setting. It also includes a description of any schedule modifications recommended (longer or shorter school day or year), and a description of any need for specialized transportation.

IEP page 7 documents the accommodation needs for students taking state and district wide assessments, such as MCAS.

Finally, IEP page 8 contains a section for additional information, anticipated graduation, a statement of transitional needs and a section for parents to indicate acceptance, partial acceptance or rejection of the proposed educational plan.

There are some special student populations whose teams must have discussion of age specific considerations. These students include our very young learners (3-5 year olds) and our student reaching the age of majority. Young learners (3-5 year olds) are supported through curriculum frameworks beginning at the pre-kindergarten level and may be recommended to participate in pre-school programming. Students age 14 and older should have a portion of their team meetings spent discussing post high school plans and transition, creating a **transition plan** which considers the student's academic, community and personal needs and steps towards their post high school goals. Older students, having turned 18 will be their own legal voice at the team table unless a guardianship process has taken place prior to their 18th birthday. For these students and their families, the district will notify them when the student turns 17 about the change in legal status for 18 year-old student and have a discussion about the age of majority at the student's team meeting prior to their 18th birthday.

The IEP is drafted from team meetings using reader friendly language. Any aspect of the proposed IEP that is not clearly understood by the parents will be explained and, if appropriate, redrafted in such a way as to clearly communicate the district's proposed educational plan.

Placement:

Once the IEP has been developed and the necessary services identified, appropriate placement is determined by the team. Placement determinations always consider the least restrictive setting available (LRE) and the student's ability to access the general education curriculum. The team

determines the specific program within the district where these services will be provided, giving careful consideration to the student's needs.

Success in the least restrictive placement requires the general education and special education teachers adopt best practices in educating our students. Ashland Public Schools expect all teachers to utilize the Building Curriculum Accommodation Plans (BCAPs) and engage in meaningful professional development which improves their practice with new instructional methodologies and conceptual understanding of the learning process. Teachers are encouraged to maintain consistent and open communication with student families so that concerns may be shared as soon as they may arise. General educators are expected to deliver all outlined accommodations for their students, whether the student is on an educational plan, or a 504 Accommodation Plan. Further, general and special education staff are expected to make all efforts to modify the curriculum using cooperative strategies when educating a student on an IEP.

In very limited and rare situations, the team determines that the student's needs cannot be met within the district's programs. The district will work with the family to locate and secure an out of district program which will meet the student's needs, respecting the mandate for least restrictive programming.

IEP Amendment:

Amendments are sometimes used to change the educational plan once accepted. The changes reflect a team discussion and proposal to edit by adding, taking out or clarifying any aspect of an educational plan, with the exception of placement considerations.

N1 or N2, Proposal Letter to Parents:

A letter is sent with all proposed educational plans and placements describing the district's proposal to the parent in easily understood language. The narrative should include answers to what the district is proposing, what is the basis of the proposal, if there is consensus or disagreement, what data was used in the decision making, and what next steps are needed.

Progress Reports:

Progress reports will be sent to your home quarterly to document your child's progress towards meeting their educational goals and objectives. A child's parent-teacher conference may be used as one quarter's progress reporting.

Rejection of Proposed IEP and/or Placement, or Consent for Testing:

When a parent rejects in whole or in part any aspect of a proposal from the district, the district must follow regulatory timelines for our response. In the case of all rejections of an educational plan, placement or re-evaluation for determination of special education eligibility, the district must send to the Bureau of Special Education Appeals a copy of the rejected proposal and an accompanying letter spelling out our intent at resolution. For initial evaluation requests only, the district has no authority to challenge a parent's refusal for initial testing.

Curriculum and Instruction

Continuum of Services

All Ashland Public Schools students have access to all school programs and extra-curricular activities. Courses are aligned with the Massachusetts Department of Education Frameworks adoption of the Common Core Curriculum. The Common Core curriculum provides a consistent and clear rubric for the expectations for student learning in every grade so that professionals and parents can work collaboratively to provide the opportunities for learning in preparation for college and career.

Professional development is provided to our staff so that they are constantly improving their practice. General education, special education and related staff members participate side by side in these opportunities because Ashland Public Schools is committed to the principle that every student is our collective responsibility to educate and prepare for their next step in life. We are currently focused on improving on our Response to Intervention initiative (RtI) so that students are identified early and interventions offered promptly should they show signs of struggling to learn taught skills.

Ashland Public Schools has a range of services for our students identified with a disability. We firmly believe in inclusive education and make every effort to have students learn alongside their peers in the general education setting. The model of inclusive education challenges our professional staff to meet the needs of all learners and many are using the concepts of universal design which suggests that multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement work to educate all learners. Its intent is to break down barriers to learning and increase access to curriculum for all students. Inclusive education helps prepare our children with disabilities for an integrated adult life and builds understanding and acceptance within the broader community.

Early Childhood Program:

Pittaway School's Pre-Kindergarten program offers a range of identification, diagnostic, educational and support services for children ages 3-5. Classes are integrated with typically developing peers from Ashland, and specialized services are provided both within and outside of the classroom setting. Ashland Public Schools provides speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, ABA tutoring, behavioral and social skill intervention and other related services support as needed, such as instruction for visual or auditory impairment. Depending on the child's need, services may be offered individually, or in the context of a placement in the pre-school setting. We work closely with Early Intervention and often participate in the "90 Day Meeting" when a child receiving early intervention is 2.9 years old and anticipates continuing to need the supports of early childhood special education services through the public schools.

Kindergarten classes are now housed at Warren School alongside grades one and two. This early education model allows kindergarten students the exposure to routines, structures and expectations at a developmentally appropriate level in preparation for their entrance into public education. Children may participate in half day or full day kindergarten sessions, depending upon parent preference, special education need and space availability.

Elementary School:

Ashland Public Schools has both Warren Elementary School for kindergarten, and grades one and two, and David Mindess Elementary School for grades three, four and five. Both elementary schools provide a full range of services and supports to unique learners and those identified with a disability. Inclusive education continues to be our top priority, but the district recognizes that some learners require the support of smaller instructional groupings for critical curriculum instruction. Two classrooms have been established to provide instruction to learners who require significant modification to methodology, instruction and performance criteria. Thus, push in and pull out special education support is available to

our learners, and their individual educational teams will discuss thoroughly the options available to support the child's learning needs.

Middle School:

Ashland Middle School houses grades six, seven and eight. Each grade is divided into teams so that the teachers get to know their students in depth and across curriculum content areas. Students in need of special education support continue to benefit from both inclusive support and if appropriate pull out small class instruction. Related services continue to be provided to those students who have identified disability in the area of speech and language, fine and gross motor or social/emotional/behavioral skill development. Collaboration between general education and special education continues to be a critical component of our educational programs. Modifications of methodology, delivery of instruction, and performance criteria are provided on an individual basis.

High School:

Ashland High School houses grades nine, ten, eleven and twelve. The same level of special education support continues, including inclusion support, tutorial, small group instruction, and related services therapies. Additionally, the high school offers a "Pathways to Independence" classroom, and two "Axis" classrooms, all three offering small group instruction and support to students who may need specialized support for all or part of the school day. With the creation of these three classrooms, Ashland Public Schools is able to support students with foundation and life skill needs, and emotional and behavioral difficulties that impact their ability to achieve in general education settings.

Instructional Groupings:

Ashland Public Schools is committed to establishing instructional groupings that are respectful of age and developmental levels. The age span from the youngest to the oldest in any one group should not exceed forty-eight months. If after the school year has begun and the instructional groups

have reached their maximum size, the Director of Student Services may decide to increase an instructional group by no more than two additional students if the additional students have compatible learning needs and if the increase would allow the additional student(s) to receive services in the public school. The increase in age span requires a waiver from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

We recognize that small groups are ideal for learning. The School Committee recommends class size limits to guide building administration in planning for teacher numbers and classroom needs. Special education also recognizes that instructional groups must be a size and composition that allows for the learning opportunity outside of the general education program to be maximized. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides the following guidelines: 8 students with one teacher; 12 students with a teacher and an assistant; 16 students with a teacher and two assistants.

Out of District Programs:

Ashland Public Schools strives to keep all our students in district. However, there are occasions when the needs of the students can only be met in more restrictive programs. All decisions regarding level of services and placement are made within team meetings with the expectation that parents are a full partner in the discussion. We will always discuss education in the least restrictive placement and try to coordinate with the family considerations that are close to Ashland and meet their child's specific needs. Such considerations include collaborative programs, private day schools and residential programs (in the order of least restrictive to most restrictive).

Responsibilities of the Team Chairperson

Ashland Public Schools is fortunate to have three special education team chairpersons to direct and supervise special education services and negotiate and maintain special education procedures for the district. They work under the Director of Student Services and collaborate closely with building administration, general education and special education teachers, related services specialists, students and their parents, and community based providers of supports and services.

When a student is identified for consideration of special education eligibility, the team chairperson begins actively working with the team to gather necessary permission to test consent and referral information that will be helpful to the team in the determination of special education eligibility. Initially, whether by parent request or by recommendation from the RtI team (Student Support Team), the team chair completes a Referral for TEAM Evaluation form (see Appendix A) and submits this to the Office of Student Services. If the request comes from a parent, the team chairperson must notify the Office of Student Services without delay because the district has five school days to respond to the parent's request. A Consent to Test form (N1 and N1A) will be generated and mailed to the parents along with a statement of Procedural Safeguards. If the district does not intend to act on the request, a letter (N2) must be sent to the parents within this same five day timeframe explaining the district's decision and refusal to evaluate the student.

Once the district receives consent from the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) the Office of Student Services' secretary will notify the appropriate staff who will have responsibility in completing assessments, complete with 30 and 45 due dates. The team chairperson works with the Office of Student Services to schedule the eligibility team meeting and identifies all members of the team by completing the IEP Meeting Invitation Worksheet (see Appendix A). All evaluation reports are available to the parents two days prior to the team meeting.

Perhaps one of the most important functions of the team chairperson is the facilitation of special education team meetings. Initial eligibility teams,

annual reviews, progress meetings, three-year re-evaluation teams, independent evaluation reviews, manifestation determination teams and transition teams are the various types of team meetings that may convene. Ashland Public Schools values the participation of the student's parents and will make strong efforts to convene meetings that work within the parents' needs. The information shared by all participants is critical to the overall planning for every student, and the team chairperson will endeavor to facilitate a meeting respectful of each member and the overall objective of the group.

Following the team meeting, it is the responsibility of the team chairperson to provide to the parents a narrative of the team meeting's conclusion, whether that be a finding of eligibility and proposed educational plan, a refusal to find eligibility, a termination of services, or a modification or change to the existing program. This narrative and accompanying documentation must be offered to the parent(s) within 3 days of the meeting if no other documentation is provided, or 10 days if the team chairperson shared either their team notes or a draft proposal of the educational plan complete with service delivery, and identified goals associated with each service.

Team chairs do not write the educational plans for students. They do read them for accuracy and edit them as necessary. It is important for all special education liaisons to complete the drafting of the educational plan within the 10 day timeframe so that any corrections can be made and the IEP sent to the parent(s) with this regulatory timeline.

Team Chairs also supervise the special education services offered to students on educational plans. They work closely with the team members and the building administration to ensure that students with disabilities are supported appropriately so that they make adequate yearly progress within the least restrictive setting.

Responsibilities of the Special Educator/Liaison

Special education teachers are vital to the overall delivery of educational services to students with disabilities. They hold masters degrees in special education and have studied the unique learning needs and instructional strategies that allow students to progress despite the impact of their disability. It is critical for special education teachers to work collaboratively with general education teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, and the family to maximize a student's potential in school. Ashland Public Schools believes that the success of our special education programs starts with the success of our general education programs.

Special education teachers are oftentimes the liaison for many students. However in some situations, a related service provider is the liaison. For example, if a student receives speech and language services only, the speech/language pathologist may be assigned to act as the student's special education liaison. As liaison, they not only deliver and supervise specialized instruction and accommodation support to the student with a disability, but they also participate in team meetings and collaborate with the related service providers in the drafting of a student's individualized educational plan. Liaisons are responsible for implementing a student's IEP and work closely with the team chairs to make sure IEPs are up-to-date, signed and fully implemented. They maintain communication with the family about student progress and report to the team any pertinent information.

Special education teachers/liaisons are responsible for completing student progress reports and forwarding these reports to the Office of Student Services for review, and mailing to the parent(s). Progress reports are due on the same day as report cards are due for each respective building. They are then reviewed and mailed home one week later.

Responsibilities of Related Service Specialists

Ashland Public Schools is fortunate to have many highly qualified related service professionals on staff, including speech and language pathologists, psychologists, social workers and school adjustment counselors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and ABA tutors. When a student needs related services in addition to those outlined above, the district contracts for such services (ie: vision and hearing services) by highly qualified professionals in the community. Each related service professional is expert within their domain and adds a tremendous body of knowledge about the impact of various skill deficits on the overall learning capacity of students with disabilities. These professionals not only evaluate students, they provide consultation and direct services to students so that they may access the curriculum more fully. They are also responsible for the appropriate documentation of their services, either through support drafting educational plans, behavior plans, or progress notes. In some infrequent cases, they are the liaison for the student as well.

Responsibilities of the Secretary

The Office of Student Services is supported by the dedicated efforts of two full time secretaries. Although cross-trained, each secretary supports the work of the office in specific areas of expertise. One secretary is proficient in special education procedure and process, the other secretary is proficient in fiscal management and scheduling of team meetings. Both are available to support the efforts of the department and the work done in each school building.

Team chairs submit to the secretary the Team Participation Worksheet when scheduling team meetings for students already identified as special education students. The secretary will then create an invitation, schedule the team meeting on the calendar of the team chair, alert the team participants through email of the meeting, and send out the meeting invitation to the parents. A reminder call will be made to confirm the parents' attendance within the week of the meeting.

Once a meeting has occurred and the appropriate documentation is completed (an IEP and/or an N1 or N2), the team chairs will submit this documentation to the secretary attached to the blue IEP Worksheet identifying the documents attached and the disposition of the materials. The secretary will copy and mail the documentation to the parent, and file it within the special education student file.

Appendix A-Forms

Release of Information

Eligibility Flow Chart

IEP Meeting Invitation Worksheet

IEP Process Worksheet

Special Education Transportation Request Form (ACCEPT)

Referral for Team Evaluation

Team Chair Referral Form

IEP Meeting Agenda/Checklist

IEP Meeting Notes Form

District Proposal Letter N1 and N2

Consent to Test Permission Form

IEP

Placement Consent Form PL 1

Observation Request Form

Appendix B- Glossary of Terminology/Acronyms

Terminology:

Individualized Education Program-Contract between the district and student/student's family outlining the agreed upon services, accommodations and goals to address the student's educational needs.

Response to Intervention/Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports- Interventions and supports identified to support a student's learning and available to all students. These interventions should be offered prior to moving towards special education eligibility.

Educational Support Personnel-Known also as teaching assistants, these people support student learning both in inclusion settings and in pullout groupings. ESPs may be assigned several students or a specific student to support but also include other students who may be in need at the time of their intervention.

504 Accommodation Plan-Accommodation plan for students with a disability outlining the specific accommodations necessary for their success in school.

Building Accommodation Plan/District Accommodation Plan-Outline of the best practices for all teachers for the benefit of all students. Every building has a copy of the plan for reference.

Procedural Safeguards-Due process protections for students and their families when involved in special education processes or accommodation plans.

Bureau of Special Education Appeals-An offshoot of DESE, it is the "court" wherein disputes are resolved.

Transition Plans-Plans for both transitions which occur naturally throughout the educational experience, **and** plans drafted once a student is 14 years old, beginning the discussion of post-secondary goals.

Acronyms:

ABA-Applied Behavioral Analysis

BCAP/DCAP-Building Accommodation Plan/District Accommodation Plan
BSEA-Bureau of Special Education Appeals
COTA-Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant
DESE-Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
ESP-Educational Support Personnel
IEE-Independent Educational Evaluation
IEP-Individualized Education Program
MCAS-Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
MTSS-Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports
N1/N2-Notice of Proposed Action
OT-Occupational Therapist
PARCC- Partnership for Readiness for College and Careers
PLEP A, PLEP B-Present Levels of Educational Performance
PT-Physical Therapist
RtI Response to Intervention/Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports
SLD-Specific Learning Disability
SL/P-Speech and Language Pathologist

I would like to thank the members of ASHPAC who graciously agreed to act as editors on this manual. Further, I would like to thank Ms. Colleen Brewer and Ms. Jodi Anderson for all their help in setting up the procedures and processes which supports the work of Special Education.

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