

# Special Education Primer

Every child has a right to a free, **appropriate public education (FAPE)**. Some students have disabilities that make it difficult for them to learn in the general public school program without special education services. The Blue Mountain Union School district assures that all students with disabilities between the ages 3 and 21 will have appropriate programs of instruction and related services designed to meet their individual needs.

When recommended by a special education team composed of parent(s), teachers, administration and speech education staff, Special Education instruction and related services are provided to students, at all grade levels. Programs for students with disabilities are designed to support participation in the general program, whenever possible.

## What is Special Education?

Federal regulations define Special Education as **specially designed instruction**, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

**Specially Designed Instruction** means appropriate adaptation of content, methodology, or delivery of instruction. In turn, related services are provided to assist students to benefit from their specially designed instruction program. Students, who are identified as having one of the specific disability exceptionalities, as determined by a multidisciplinary team, are eligible for special education and related services. *Having one of the listed disabilities is not enough to qualify a child for special education. IDEA requires evidence that the disability adversely affects a student's performance at school and that there is a need for specialized instruction.* Special education is available to eligible students in the school system from the time of their third birthday to graduation or age 21. If an eligible student turns 21 during the school year, special education will continue until the end of the school year.

At BMU, consultative services to teachers and instructional services to students with disabilities are provided by teacher trained in special education. The extent of the special education teacher's involvement with a student with a disability will vary, depending upon the student's need for specialized instruction. The special education teacher and the classroom teachers collaborate on the selection and modification of lessons that are designed to enhance student access in the general education classroom.

## Child Support Team A Pre-referral process

The Child Support Team is a general education initiative and acts as a pre-referral process before a referral to special education review and evaluation is made; emergency situations might dictate a more timely procedure. A Child Support Team (CST) is

composed of pertinent staff members who meet to review their concerns and plan strategies to assist particular students in their general education classroom and to monitor those students' progress. Parents are made aware of this pre-referral process before it is initiated. A staff member or parent may direct concerns regarding particular students to the CST. Subsequently, action plans are written and intervention strategies are implemented.

After invention strategies have been implemented, the CST meets to evaluate student progress to determine success of strategies, and to decide on continuation or revision of interventions. Most often, problems are resolved at this level.

Following interventions, team members may believe it is necessary to refer a student evaluation/assessment to consider eligibility for special education. Students are referred to the EPT only after the resources/strategies of the general education program are fully expended.

## **The Referral Process**

Referrals usually come from the CST (Child Support Team), the student's teacher, or his/her parent. Referrals can, however, be made from other sources such as an agency or family physician. If evidence is produced that special education services may be needed, a referral is then made to the special education team. Before the team can proceed to gather information or to evaluate the student and recommend an appropriate program, parents are a part of the team too. They must be given written consent before evaluation and testing begin. Assessments are done only with the knowledge and consent of the parents as they are part of the team. When results are brought back to the team, parents are provided with written notice about a team meeting at least five school days prior to the scheduled meeting date.

Parents may refuse to give consent for the evaluation and placement. They may also revoke consent if it has already been given. Regulations governing special education provide specific time schedules during which the evaluation and placement procedures must be completed. An evaluation should be completed within 60 days and a meeting should be scheduled to determine eligibility held, unless a "Delay of Evaluation" has been sent. This time limit does not include the time required to obtain written parental consent.

## **Helpful Suggestions for Parents In Preparation for Team Meeting**

**Talk to your child.** Inquire about your child's feelings towards school. Identify what your child feels is easy and difficult for them in school. Ask if there is something that he/she would like to do better.

**Meet with your child's teachers before hand** for an informal update on your child's progress and behavior during the school year.

**Visit your child's classroom.** Make an appointment to observe your child in the classroom.

**Review your child's records.** Ensure that your own records at home coincide with those kept at school. If necessary, make an appointment with the school to review the school's records and request an updated copy of those records.

**Before the team meeting, be sure you understand the nature and basis of your child's disability.** Do you have enough information? Have you reviewed the evaluation reports? Do you understand the meaning of the diagnosis? Make sure you understand any "jargon".

**Become familiar with the laws of both state and federal government pertaining to special education issues.** Read the "Procedural Safeguards" pamphlet provided by the school district informing you of your rights. Feel free to ask questions.

**Communicate with the school.** Avoiding surprises at team meetings will enhance school/parent partnerships. If you anticipate requesting new services, further evaluations, or will be inviting others to the meeting, inform the school team and give them a copy of any request (s) beforehand.

- **Prepare to share what you know about your child.** Jot down some notes about your child, such as interests, hobbies, relationships with family and friends, behavior at home, things she/he does well, or has difficulty with.
- **Prepare questions.** Bring with you a list of any questions you would like to discuss at the meeting.
- **Be prepared to discuss expectations for your child.** Jot down what you think your child needs and the extent of progress you would like to see during the school year. You should consider your child's vocational and pre-vocational needs.
- **Staff should receive beforehand any recent evaluations or reports done outside the school** that you believe will be of value to your child's educational planning or that you wish to discuss in the meeting.