

Special Education Resources for Parents

Special education teachers, specialists, and administrators serve as ongoing resources for students and parents throughout the school year. At times, parents will have questions about who to contact and how best to seek assistance with the special education process for their children. The following role descriptions and contact recommendations may be useful in navigating this process.

Special Education Liaison/Teacher: Special education teachers deliver services for the majority of students in special education. The special education teacher is certified and trained to deliver specially designed academic instruction in the student's areas of need related to his/her disability. The term "liaison" refers to a special education teacher's responsibility as case manager for a group of students in his/her building. As liaison, the assigned special education teacher is the primary contact for parents and teachers, oversees all special education programming, and monitors student progress. The liaison conducts academic evaluations, engages in routine data collection, and writes Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Although some students may work with more than one special education teacher or staff member, **the liaison is the first person parents should contact when concerns arise.**

Special Education Teaching Assistant: Teaching assistants help special education teachers implement student special education services within and outside the classroom. These individuals are college graduates with varying levels of specialized training, depending on their assignments. Many are certified as general or special education teachers. Also known as "aides" or "paraprofessionals," assistants work under the direction and supervision of special education teachers. They do not contact parents directly regarding student progress, but they are sometimes asked to complete home-school communication logs and routinely collect data and provide input to special education teachers preparing progress reports and current performance summaries for IEP meetings.

Special Education Chairperson: The special education chairperson facilitates Team meetings and acts as a resource to parents on evaluations, referrals, and special education procedures. Special education chairpersons work with teachers and specialists to ensure that the District is in compliance with special education regulations and student needs are being met. Parents are encouraged to contact the special education chairperson with any problems or concerns that have not been resolved by the special education liaison.

School Psychologist: School psychologists conduct initial and three year evaluations of students, provide counseling services, and consult with the Team on student learning and social-emotional issues. Parents are welcome to contact the school psychologist for assistance in understanding learning and mental health diagnoses, interpreting neuropsychological testing, and carrying over strategies between school and home.

Related Service Providers: Students on IEPs may receive related services from specialists that include physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, and occupational therapists. These individuals provide direct services or consultation on children's behalf, contribute to the Team's development of IEP goals, conduct evaluations, and monitor student progress. Parents are welcome to contact related services providers directly with any questions related to services in these areas.

Director of Student Services: The Director of Student Services manages several district-wide programs, including preschool, homeless students, Section 504, health services, English Language Learner education, counseling, and special education. As administrator for special education, the Director of Student Services oversees compliance in collaboration with the special education chairpersons, works with the principals to supervise and evaluate staff, develops and supports new programs, provides teacher training, and serves as a resource for parents and community members. Parents are encouraged to contact the Director of Student Services for information on disabilities and advice on student programming, special education regulations, and/or how to navigate and advocate for children within the special education process.

Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC): The SEPAC is an organization that supports children with disabilities and their parents within the Manchester-Essex community. The mission of the SEPAC is to support and sustain high quality programming and services for students with disabilities, serve as an educational and networking resource, and promote a respect for diversity and inclusiveness within the schools and community. A board of elected SEPAC representatives meets bi-monthly to organize events and develop resources for parents. More information on SEPAC is available on the District web site.

Special Education Parent Mentors: Parents new to the special education process have the opportunity to speak or meet with a trained mentor who can answer questions about paperwork and procedures and provide emotional support. Mentoring is a confidential process designed to assist parents of children with disabilities who may have recently learned about a new diagnosis and/or require support in understanding the basics of the special education process. More information on parent mentors is available through the special education chairpersons.

MERSD Student Services Web Site: The District offers a student services web site that provides specialized program descriptions, upcoming news and events, information on new staff members, and informative web resources for parents. Parents can sign up for regular web site updates by visiting www.studentservices.mersd.org and entering their e-mail addresses.