



What Special Education Programs Are Available?

Autistic Support

Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8 Autistic Support provides services to children who have been diagnosed with autism and identified as currently needing an individualized level of intervention in the areas of communication, social cognition, and behavior. Autistic support collaborates with district staff members and families to support the child to achieve skills, knowledge, and independence in order to be successful in the school environment. Itinerant teachers work directly and indirectly with students to develop effective and appropriate modes of communication, to increase the receptivity and capacity for learning, and support the student to develop adaptive behaviors that will enable the child to be successful and participate independently in a variety of settings and activities.

Emotional Support

Emotional Support Services within Special Education is available to those students who are determined to be in need of the service. This determination is typically supported by mental health diagnosis from outside providers (psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, pediatricians, or other medical professionals) in addition to a significant impact on the student's learning or the ability of other students to learn.

When behavior of an Emotional Support student negatively impacts academic progress, a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and resulting Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP) must be developed by the IEP team.

Westmont Hilltop School District has two Emotional Support Teachers – one at the Elementary School and one who services the Middle and High School. Both staff also have additional job responsibilities outside of Emotional Support services and may service other regular education or special education students in those roles. It should be noted that Emotional Support Teachers are not counselors and do not provide therapy to the students but can discuss the behavior, factors that contribute, and teach the student how to better respond to those factors.

Emotional Support Services at the Elementary School target the specific problem behavior in both an inclusive (in class) and pull out model of support using behavior modification and skill instruction. With recess and the use of cooperative groups in all grades within the building, social skills such as sharing, turn taking, and tolerance are often need areas for Elementary students. These skills and related strategies can be taught in pull out settings with the Emotional

Support Teacher, practiced in a pull out setting with a few peers, and then reinforced in the regular classroom by the Emotional Support teacher assisting the student.

Emotional Support Services at the Middle and High School level target the specific problem behavior after observation in the regular classroom setting, observation in a cooperative learning group situation, or when the student or teacher expresses a concern. Depending on the frequency and severity of the target behavior, a weekly or daily behavior report card is utilized to monitor the behavior of concern and teach replacement behavior at the Middle School level. At the High School level, an independent self- monitoring checklist is created for the student to complete and then discuss in a follow-up session with the Emotional Support Teacher. At the Middle School level, social skills to improve peer interactions are taught in cooperative learning groups during scheduled lunch times. At the High School level, strategies to assist with improving social skills are discussed during individual sessions. The Emotional Support program at the High School level focuses on scheduling, credit completion, career exploration, and employment.

Hearing Impaired Support

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program through Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8 provides various services to students in need of this type of support. The Hearing Impaired Support staff includes teachers, sign language interpreters, and supervisors who work in a spirit of cooperation with families, school district and agencies, as well as with other IU personnel to provide quality services to deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. Each student identified as deaf or hard of hearing is provided with a specially designed program to meet his or her needs in the least restrictive environment. The goal of the Hearing Impaired Support staff is to provide the services necessary for students to develop the communication, social, and academic skills to succeed both in school and in the community at large. The Hearing Impaired Support staff provides the information and support needed by students and their families to make effective decisions regarding communication methods, educational placements, or career planning.

Learning Support

The learning support program at the elementary school includes interventions in the regular education classroom and the resource room for children with special needs. Learning support teachers collaborate with regular education teachers to provide specially designed instruction based on the needs of the child receiving learning support services. Accommodations could include small group instruction, modified tests and assignments, re-teaching of concepts, small group/individual testing, and teaching delivered at the student's instructional level.

The learning support program at the middle school level offers a continuum of services to meet the varying individual needs of the special education student. Every effort is made to have the

student participate fully with his or her non-disabled peers in the general education curriculum. Inclusive classrooms have the availability of a learning support teacher who collaborates with the regular education teacher. Collaboration allows for the development and implementation of appropriate accommodations which enable the student to succeed academically. Resource rooms provide remediation, review, or re-teaching during a sessions during homeroom periods. If the IEP team determines that more extensive modifications are needed, small group classes are offered in all levels to meet the specific individualized needs of the students.

At the high school level, students with IEPs can expect a fully inclusive academic approach. The high school learning support program provides extra assistance to students with their academic courses. Learning support teachers teach academic classes as well as academic reinforcement. During Academic Reinforcement, students receive additional individualized support in the general education curriculum in the learning support classroom. This enables the students to receive individual assistance with general education curriculum directly in their classes. Enrollment in Academic Reinforcement is based upon each student's individual needs as per the IEP team decision.

Life Skills Support

This program, provided by Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8, is designed with instruction that is age appropriate and individualized to the student's ability level. During the elementary years the program concentrates on developing communication and functional academic skills. In addition, this program develops daily living skills that are designed to help students participate in recreational and community activities.

As the students move into the middle and high school programs, the main emphasis begins to shift from functional academics to transition. The student and the family begin to plan for the student's transition from secondary education to adult living. The student is encouraged to develop a clear understanding of his/her own strengths, weaknesses and interests. This knowledge forms a basis for developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills that will enable the student to succeed in the transition from high school to adult living.

At the high school level, the IEP team which includes the family, the student and outside agencies, develop a transition plan. This plan identifies the student's desired post-school outcomes and is used to develop the IEP goals and objectives. Emphasis at this level is placed on developing vocational skills and daily living skills that will enable the student to participate in the community to the maximum extent possible and to realize the desired post-school outcomes.

Speech and Language Support

Speech and Language Support is an IU-08 service that is provided at the Elementary, Middle and High School levels, depending on the needs of the students. Services are provided for all levels of students, including those in basic education, learning support, gifted support, emotional support, hearing impaired, autism spectrum disorder and life skills support. Each program is individualized, depending on the communication needs of the student.

The area of Speech and Language Support encompasses many facets of communication. These areas include:

- Articulation—speech sound production/oral motor skills
- Expressive language—sentence structure/formation, ability to communicate effectively
- Receptive language—concepts, vocabulary, auditory skills, literacy
- Pragmatic language—everyday usage of language/social language skills
- Fluency—‘choppy’ patterns of speaking/stuttering
- Voice—therapy provided per doctor recommendation
- Assistive Technology—use of low-tech switches/devices, portable writing devices to high-tech verbal output devices for students with significant verbal and/or written communication deficits

Speech and Language Support is under the guidelines of special education in the state of Pennsylvania. Therefore, the process and paperwork timelines are followed diligently.

It is the one support service that screens, assesses, identifies, treats and exits student who qualify for services.

Screening process: Each student that enters kindergarten is screened for speech. New students are also screened, with follow-up screenings occurring as designated by the speech therapist. Classroom teacher referrals, parent referrals, students incoming with current paperwork and the Instructional Support Team (IST) process elicit screening procedures and recommendations.

Assessment/Placement decisions: Depending on the outcome of the screening process, service delivery options are considered. These include: multi-disciplinary evaluation and full Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans or Instructional Support Team (IST) services, which are more of a short-term delivery of services. Usually IST referrals are for students with no academic problems, single sound errors or mild fluency issues.

Treatment of speech and language needs: IEP/IST goals/objectives are developed/written with parent and teacher inputs. Services are provided either in the classroom environment such as during reading class (push-in) or through pull-out in the speech room. This type of service is dependent on the needs of the student and the recommendations of the IEP/IST team. Continued consultation with classroom teachers and parents is a vital factor in success of the program. In the therapy setting, activities are connected with the curriculum as well as Pennsylvania

Academic Standards. During treatment, the main premise of the program is the build on the student's strengths to support their needs. We never settle for less than our best and try our best in all endeavors. A positive learning environment is fostered for each student, with use of tangible rewards, verbal praise and a fun environment for optimum learning. For those with IEPs and more involved programs, students are in the program for only as long as they need it. Once they have met their goals and objectives, services are rendered complete.

Visually Impaired Support Services

Visually Impaired services may be provided to a student who qualifies with an identified visual impairment and whose progress in the general education curriculum is impacted by their visual impairment. Visual impairments include disorders in the sense of vision that affect the central vision acuity, the field of vision, color perception, or binocular visual function.

Vision Support Services have the following roles and responsibilities:

Have primary responsibility for specialized instruction and services required to meet the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments.

Possess the skills and abilities necessary to provide and coordinate specialized instruction for students with visual impairments.

Assist the student, parents, special and general education teachers and paraprofessionals, and the student's sighted peers in:

- understanding the unique educational needs and learning characteristics of students with visual impairments,
- becoming aware of services and support available from local programs for students with visual impairments,
- acquiring information regarding local, state, and national resources for the education of students with visual impairment, and
- interpreting the students with visual impairments specific eye condition, the educational implications of the visual impairment, and the results of functional vision and learning media assessments.
- Consults regularly with the general education classroom teacher, other regular and special education personnel, parents, and others to coordinate programs and services for the student with a visual impairment.

Assure that large print or braille texts, supplementary materials, educational aids, and equipment needed by the student with a visual impairment, and the general education classroom teacher or special education teacher, are provided in a timely manner to ensure the student's maximum participation in all classroom activities.

Provide assistance to the general education classroom teacher and/or special education teacher in academic subjects and activities of the classroom that, as a direct result of the student's visual impairment, require adaptation for the student.

Provide initial and ongoing assessment:

- consults with assessment team to determine appropriate testing materials
- modifications needed
- assists with assessments when needed

- interprets assessment results when needed

Conduct functional vision/learning media assessments and produces written reports.

Attend IEP meetings for students with visual impairments.

Provide in-service training programs for school personnel and students and education for parents regarding the needs of students with visual impairments and adaptations and services for students with visual impairments.

Provide instruction in the development and maintenance of skills to meet the student's unique educational needs in the following areas, as indicated in the IEP:

- low vision and visual efficiency skills
- concept development & academic skills
- daily living skills
- career and vocational education skills
- communication skills (these skills include braille reading and writing as appropriate)
- social/emotional skills and abilities
- sensory motor skills
- technology