

## Albert Einstein Academies Charter Elementary School



### Inclusion Policy

#### **Purpose**

Albert Einstein Academies (Albert Einstein Academy Charter Elementary School and Albert Einstein Academy Charter Middle School) are the first authorized public charter schools with a K-8 International Baccalaureate continuum in San Diego. Our school's mission is to educate children to contribute and succeed as active thinkers in the world. We nurture, cultivate, and inspire multilingual, critical thinkers who are well-rounded, responsible, global citizens uniquely prepared to thrive, lead, and create positive change in the 21st century.

We meet the special education needs of our students by creating services and supports that exceed the minimum required for compliance with federal and state special education law. We accomplish our mission by monitoring the unique academic needs of each individual. Systems and resources are allocated to provide students with a learning environment that engages them at their instructional level. In order to accomplish our mission, we believe that the school needs to regularly evaluate the special education service delivery model to ensure that all AEACES students are given access to the IBPYP and are supported in their pathway to success.

#### **Principles**

Our school's guiding principle is to provide a comprehensive special education program within the PYP. We monitor students' progress in the areas of academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs through Student Success Team (SST) meetings, which include: parents/guardians, general education teacher(s), an administrator, school psychologist, education specialist, and any other support teachers who work with the student. For students identified with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan, teachers are provided information regarding learning strengths and challenges, goals, accommodations, modifications, background, and educational history.

We adhere to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) for students with IEPs and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for students with 504 Plans. Albert Einstein Academies' comprehensive special education program meets and exceeds the requirements of IDEIA and ADA by progress monitoring students with academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. IEP and 504 meetings are held annually, and more frequently when needed. All IEP/504 team members are informed and trained to understand the unique learning profile of a student with an IEP or 504 plan. The goal is to ensure that all students are progressing in all areas.

In order to ensure compliance with IDEIA and ADA, we continually monitor ourselves by evaluating if students with disabilities are receiving a quality education that is comparable to their general education peers. All students with an IEP or 504 Plan are included in the general education classroom, field trips,

and extracurricular programs to the maximum extent possible. In fact, it is encouraged that special education students involve themselves in extracurricular opportunities and field trips to maximize opportunities for growth in social skills.

## **Practices**

### ***Inclusion***

Albert Einstein Academy Charter Elementary School (AEACES) has primarily adopted an inclusive special education model in its PYP. The IB defines inclusion as, “an ongoing process that aims to increase access and engagement in learning for all students by identifying and removing barriers” (*Special educational needs within the International Baccalaureate programmes*, 2010). In order to meet this standard, PYP teachers are mindful of responding positively to the unique needs of each student and developing policies and practices to include all students. On a daily basis, students with special needs in the PYP are included in general education classes and extracurricular activities to the fullest extent possible. Instructional assistants provide in-class support for students with IEPs and work closely with the general education teachers and Education Specialists to provide in-depth information about student progress and needs. We recognize that inclusion is not always the best practice for every student, and uphold the legal right that all students must be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) in order to meet his or her educational needs.

### ***Differentiation***

In the IB publication *Special educational needs within the International Baccalaureate programmes* (2010), differentiation is described as a teacher’s response to the diverse learning needs of the students and working **with** each learner to identify the most effective strategies to meet agreed upon goals. Teachers at AEACES develop strategic plans for differentiation in collaboration with their teaching partners, grade level teams, and SST and IEP team members. Using the principles of Bloom’s Taxonomy and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge Levels, teachers develop conceptual inquiry questions to address all levels of learning in the classroom. All general education teachers in the PYP have access to IEP and 504 plan information, such as accommodations, modifications and goals to assist in creating differentiated lessons and unit planners that utilize Universal Design Learning and student agency to meet the specific needs of all learners. At AEACES, we are aware that all students learn differently and strive to embrace these unique differences in our classroom instruction and planning.

There are four specific elements that teachers can differentiate in the classroom to meet the needs of all learners:

- *Content* - what the student will learn
- *Process* - how the student will learn the content
- *Products* - what the student will produce to demonstrate mastery of content
- *Learning Environment* - how the classroom looks and feels

### ***Identification and Intervention***

*Student Success Team Meetings-* The purpose of Student Success Team (SST) meetings is to collaboratively review Tier 1 interventions implemented and develop Tier 2 interventions for at-risk students and to set specific goals addressing identified areas of concern. This meeting typically includes teachers, parents, support teachers, Special Education staff, and administrators. Follow-up SST meetings are held every 6-8 weeks in order to measure the effectiveness of the intervention plan, as well as to gather information regarding the student's response to, and rate of progress with, intervention. The SST Team may recommend assessment.

The SST Process:

- Initial Referral (by teacher(s) and/or parents)
- Documentation of classroom interventions and assessment data
- Initial SST Meeting
- Intervention Form including specific goals
- Follow-up SST meeting(s)
  - If student is making progress on goals, the SST team will set new goals and continue or modify the intervention plan as necessary.
  - If student is not making progress on goals, the SST team may recommend assessment for a general education 504 Plan or special education (IEP).
  - If student has met goals and is performing at grade level with previous areas of concern, then he or she is exited from the SST Process (these records are held and reviewed internally).

*AEACES Learning Center* - The mission of the AEACES Learning Center is to support students with foundational learning skills in a strategic and encouraging environment. Objectives include:

- progress monitoring and assessment
- small group intensive instruction
- K-2 early intervention
- Executive functioning skills and habits for successful learning
- language acquisition
- foundational math and literacy skills
- math reasoning and problem solving
- personal and social emotional well-being
- critical thinking and inquiry skills

Students who receive support in the AEACES Learning Center include students with IEPs and at-risk general education students who have demonstrated a need for additional support in foundational literacy and math skills. General education students are identified for Learning Center support in a variety of ways and school personnel take care to consider all available data and information when making recommendations:

- AIMSWeb Benchmark Assessments (administered in the fall, winter, and spring)

- CAASPP Assessment Results
- ELPAC Results
- MAP (Measures of Academic Performance) Assessment Results
- SST Team recommendations
- Past and present classroom performance

All students who attend the AEACES Learning Center are assessed and monitored for progress frequently (1-4 times per month) using curriculum-based measures (CBMs) in their respective areas of need. Assessment data is stored in student files and/or in Google spreadsheets.

Regular and consistent SST meetings, Intervention Form documentation, and Learning Center progress monitoring provide the SST with systematic and accurate data. This data is used to make appropriate and timely recommendations for special education assessment, which fulfills the IDEIA's Child Find requirement to identify all students with a suspected disability. Additionally, this system helps to ensure that no at-risk students "fall through the cracks."

### ***Assessment***

Assessment in the PYP should be varied, ongoing and relevant to the learner. Students with special needs are assessed across all criteria with their peers in the general education classroom and in accordance with his or her IEP or 504 Plan. Please see AEACES's Assessment Policy for more detailed information.

### ***Practice***

The IB has identified four principles of good practice that emphasize the whole person, promote equal access to the curriculum for all learners, and are particularly relevant to students with special needs:

- *Affirming identity and building self esteem* - embracing diverse learners, valuing cultural perspectives, collaborating with parents to understand how to best achieve shared goals
- *Valuing prior knowledge* - use prior understanding to differentiate tasks, build background knowledge when planning a unit or lesson
- *Scaffolding* - use of visual aids, collaborative groups, teacher demonstrations, students' home language
- *Extended learning* - provide numerous opportunities to engage with complex texts and experiences

### **Resources**

AEACES provides a wealth of resources and learning opportunities for teachers and students alike. Professional development in the areas of IB, special education, best practices, Common Core State Standards, IEP legal guidelines, and more are encouraged by administration and regularly attended by PYP teachers and support staff. The special education department at AEACES works directly with the El Dorado County Charter Special Education Local Planning Area (SELPA) by attending monthly Professional Learning Network meetings, collaborating with a SELPA Program Specialist, and being directly involved with the most updated information regarding changes in the field of special education.

All students in the PYP have direct access to a school psychologist and Education Specialist, who are on site daily. The Education Specialists oversee the daily schedule and support services provided by several instructional assistants, who work directly with the students in the general education classrooms and in AEACES's Learning Center in small group settings. Other service providers who support our students with special needs at AEACES include a Speech/Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Deaf/Hard of Hearing Itinerant Teacher, Educational Audiologist, Adapted Physical Education Teacher, Vision Therapist, and Assistive Technology Specialist. These related services, among others, are provided through our school as determined by each student's IEP and specific needs.

### **Confidentiality**

We uphold the legal requirement that all information regarding students' special needs must be kept confidential. AEACES uses a secure, online system for writing IEPs that is only accessible by direct service providers. Relevant information contained in each student's IEP or 504 Plan is shared internally with the teachers and support staff who work directly with those students. Master files containing original IEPs and 504 Plans are stored in locked filing cabinets with access restricted to specific staff members. Our teachers and support staff make every effort to create an inclusive learning environment that does not stigmatize students based on learning differences.

### **Reflection**

At AEACES, we are constantly striving to develop the best educational program for all students. We regularly collaborate in teams to determine what changes can be made in the PYP in the future to meet our schoolwide and program-specific goals. We are constantly reevaluating our program structure and resources as new students enroll and needs are evolving. The Inclusion Policy was developed with the intent of being a work in progress that evolves along with the needs of our current population. The policy will be reviewed annually in order to stay updated with legislation, staff roles and responsibilities, and current student enrollment.