



## **Northern Heights Elementary School IB-Primary Years Program Special Education Needs (SEN) Policy**

### **Northern Heights Mission**

Northern Heights Elementary School provides a balanced, engaging, and comprehensive education that prepares all students for success as global citizens. We strive to develop caring, principled individuals with a sense of community, who value individual differences and diverse perspectives. As reflective thinkers and inquirers, we are inspired to take actions that positively contribute to our ever-changing world.

### **Special Education Philosophy**

We believe all learners have unique strengths and needs that influence their development physically, emotionally, socially and mentally. Our goal is to ensure that all students are able to maximize their potential in each of these areas of development. To this end, we strive to build upon each student's strengths and further meet their needs in order to provide access to all learning within the IB Primary Years Program. For the purposes of the SEN Policy, we define "special needs" students as any learner who is identified for specialized programs (Highly Capable, Special Education, English Language Learner), as well as those who require additional support, modification or differentiation of regular program in order to gain access to learning. Our SEN philosophy is well aligned with the school's mission, as the mission statement includes comprehensive education that prepares all students for success. Additionally, the mission statement demonstrates value for individual differences and diverse perspectives, leading to the development of internationally minded individuals. This value is actualized through a strengths-based approach to our special needs population, combined with differentiated learning strategies. Our philosophy is supportive of the IB pedagogy and the mission statement.

### **SEN Policy Goals**

We establish this policy as a guide for our ongoing practice, with the following goals:

- To ensure that all students have full and equal access to learning within the Primary Years Program,
- To ensure all students have opportunity to develop international mindedness through interaction with and understanding of the Learner Profile,
- To promote positive self-esteem and a sense of personal place in community for all students,
- To provide guidance and structure for our learning community in meeting the educational needs of all students,
- To promote the use of recognized best practices for specific populations,
- To encourage collaboration and shared practice across populations,
- To engage staff, students, parents and community in shared responsibility for the success of each student, and
- To identify and align systems and resources necessary to support all students.

## Instructional Approaches

### Differentiation:

At Northern Heights Elementary, we recognize that all students learn differently and, therefore, may require varied instructional strategies, curricula, learning engagements and assessments of their progress. To this end, we use differentiated instruction in the general education classroom, as well as in all special needs programs. We define differentiated instruction as the adaptation of instruction in order to meet the identified needs of each student. Differentiated instruction is based upon the belief that students learn best when they make connections between the curriculum and their diverse interests and experiences, a belief that is shared in PYP pedagogy. Differentiation communicates respect for individual differences by recognizing that “one size” instruction does not fit all students. By honoring diverse learning needs, our students are able to see themselves as part of a learning community where everyone has strengths, as well as challenges. We appreciate that differentiation is consistent with the PYP perspective that diversity provides opportunities. When planning for differentiation teachers give consideration to five essential elements: content, process, product, learning environment and assessment. Instruction may be differentiated in one or more of these elements, as determined by student learning needs and targeted goals. There are many, varied strategies for differentiating instruction. The following table provides examples:

Strategies for Differentiating Instruction	
<b>Based on Content &amp; Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize pre-tests to assess where individual students need to begin study of a given topic or unit.</li> <li>• Encourage thinking at various levels of Bloom's taxonomy.</li> <li>• Use a variety of instructional delivery methods to address different learning styles.</li> <li>• Break assignments into smaller, more manageable parts that include structured directions for each part.</li> <li>• Choose broad instructional concepts and skills that lend themselves to understanding at various levels of complexity.</li> <li>• Use specially designed instruction and/or materials, as appropriate</li> </ul>
<b>Based on Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to a variety of materials which target different learning preferences and reading abilities.</li> <li>• Develop activities that target auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners.</li> <li>• Establish stations for inquiry-based, independent learning activities.</li> <li>• Create activities that vary in level of complexity and degree of abstract thinking required.</li> <li>• Use flexible grouping to group and regroup students based on factors including content, ability, and assessment results.</li> </ul>
<b>Based on Product</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a variety of assessment strategies, including performance-based and open-ended assessment.</li> <li>• Balance teacher-assigned and student-selected projects.</li> <li>• Offer students a choice of projects that reflect a variety of learning styles and interests.</li> <li>• Make assessment an ongoing, interactive process.</li> </ul>
<b>Based on Learning Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grouping: flexible, small group and 1:1</li> <li>• Offer a variety of visual supports and manipulatives</li> <li>• Specialized settings such as Resource Room, Quiet Space</li> <li>• Cluster grouping and/or “walk to....” models for homogeneous grouping</li> <li>• Supportive classroom equipment: study carrels, timers, sensory integration supports, headphones</li> <li>• Access to technology</li> </ul>

The PYP planner provides the structure and process for intentional planning leading to differentiation. Inquiry-based learning that honors student interests and abilities ensures multiple access points for students with diverse needs. Open-ended tasks and performance assessments give all students opportunity to demonstrate learning in areas of study. Students are also able to reflect on their use of the Approaches to Learning, key concepts and application of Learner Profile attributes through differentiated student-reflection and portfolio processes.

### **Inclusion:**

The Northern Heights learning community is committed to providing an inclusive, culturally responsive learning environment for all children and adults. We strive to provide opportunities for all students to develop alongside each other, academically and socio-emotionally, regardless of program identification or special need. To do so requires that we adopt inclusive practices in our classrooms and across our wider school community. When engaged in academic learning our students with special needs engage inclusively in the general education classroom, whole group and in small heterogeneous groupings. While learning targets and content are the same for all students, specialist support in the form of differentiated materials, tasks or adult assistance may be provided to ensure access to all learning opportunities. Students also engage inclusively in physical education, music, library and Spanish, as well as during assemblies, lunch and on the playground. While full inclusion is the goal, there are some students who require additional supports beyond what is possible in the typical general education classroom. These students receive additional support through a pull-out model, specific to their identified needs and program goals. Examples include those children receiving speech therapy, Level 1-English Language Learners, some students with individual education plans (IEPs). We recognize the importance of ongoing progress monitoring and assessment that provides us with information about the most appropriate ways of serving children, based on their most current and immediate needs. Service through the pull-out model is continuously evaluated and remains in place only as long as there is evidence of need.

## **Special Needs Program Models**

### **English Language Learners (ELL):**

Our English Language Learners (ELL) Program is designed to accelerate English acquisition for students whose first language is not English and to further assist them in becoming successful learners in the general education classroom. English Language Learner program resources are provided to supplement the ELL student's basic educational program. Our program efforts are focused on students acquisition of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and development of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

At Northern Heights, responsibility for the primary, direct instruction of English Language Learner eligible students resides with the classroom teacher. Instruction is provided inclusively using research-based instructional approaches that are highly effective with all language learners, not just those identified as ELL. These include visual thinking maps, Guided Language Acquisition and Design (GLAD) and sheltered instruction.

Different levels of support can be delivered within the classroom setting:

- Students in a content ELL program use a combination of ELL materials and regular classroom materials to learn conversational English while simultaneously developing academic skills. The classroom teacher designs lesson accommodations and modifications according to the English language needs of the student.

- Monitored students work entirely under the direction of the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher is encouraged to seek support from the ELL Specialist.
- While most ELL students receive instruction inclusively, the ELL Specialist may work in a pull-out setting with Level 1 students, typically those just entering the country with no English language skills.

To support English language learners in accessing the academic language and concepts within the Units of Inquiry, a certified ELL Specialist may provide direct services in the classroom in a co-planning/co-teaching model with the classroom teacher. This is to allow the teacher the use and practice of research-based practices such as sheltered instruction (SI), GLAD, Thinking Maps, engagement strategies, and academic conversations.

### **Student's Eligible for Special Education Services:**

Northern Heights provides several program options for students identified as eligible for Special Education services. These include a Developmental Preschool (District Cluster Program), Resource Program, Access in the Mainstream Setting (AIMS), Speech and Language and Occupational/Physical Therapy. Almost all students who qualify for these programs have a developmental or specific learning disability. Many of these students also have a behavioral component to their IEP's, focusing on pro-social communication and development of self-regulation skills. Individualized Education Plans, with levels of performance, learning goals, objectives, services and accommodations guide the instructional delivery model for each student. All students with IEP's are served as inclusively as possible, dependent on their identified needs and IEP goals. Special Education teachers frequently collaborate in order to ensure that students and teachers receive the need support to ensure successful learning in the general education classroom. Pull-out is determined to be most appropriate when specially designed instruction requires materials and approaches that are totally different from those used in the classroom, and when instruction must be delivered in small group or 1:1.

Classroom teachers and special education staff work very closely to ensure that IEP students have access to learning in the PYP. The special education teachers help students develop and deepen their understanding of Learner Profile attributes through use of vocabulary, daily discussions and intentional connections. They also intentionally reinforce and celebrate student demonstrations of the attributes. Content taught through the Units of Inquiry is supported through vocabulary development, parallel tasks, appropriately leveled inquiry and modified projects or assessments. IEP students frequently engage inclusively in inquiry processes, but sometimes receive additional support, practice and instruction in the Resource Room. This scaffolding allows the students to develop deeper content understand and promotes application of learning through supported action.

### **Developmental Preschool**

The developmental preschool program provides a language-based curriculum to children ages 3-5 from throughout the school district. Students attend either the morning or afternoon session four days a week. The majority of children attending our program have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) documenting their specific needs related to an identified delay in one or more of the following areas: social emotional, gross motor, fine motor, language, adaptive, and/or cognitive skills (including reading, writing, and math). However, each session has space allocated for typically developing peers.

- Goals:
  - Foster positive adult and peer relationships within a safe, trusting and responsive environment
  - Successful participation in classroom routines and activities
  - Communication with families to work toward shared goals
  - Promote exploration, wonder, creativity and risk taking through units of inquiry

- Specially designed instruction focused on student's progress on IEP goals
- Services:
  - Speech & Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, and School Nurse all collaborate with the classroom teacher to provide targeted instruction for one on one, small group, or whole group instruction
  - Instruction is provided within a self-contained classroom setting
- General Education Support:
  - Students who attend developmental preschool at Northern Heights transition into the kindergarten program designated by their IEP team as the best placement to meet their educational needs. IEP teams consider general education kindergarten with resource room support at their home school along with our specialized programs offered at buildings that may not be their home school.

### **Resource Room**

The resource room program provides support for students with an identified disability per Washington State statutes and as determined by the Eligibility Team including the student's parents/guardians, school psychologist, school administrator, general education teacher, special education teacher and other staff as determined appropriate. Each student has an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) document outlining student's needs, educational goals, and special education services. Instruction includes the academic areas of reading, written language and math. Additionally, instruction is provided for social and emotional, behavior, executive functioning, learning strategies, and adaptive skills.

- Goals:
  - The goal is to always provide the least restrictive environment while supporting the student's learning.
  - Access to the grade level curriculum/units of inquiry is provided with the needed supports and accommodations for student success.
  - Specially designed instruction focuses on student's progress on IEP goals.
  - Student independence is fostered academically and socially.
- Services:
  - A continuum of services is provided for kindergarten through fifth grade.
  - The resource program provides a range of instructional support and services ranging from collaboration with general education teachers, support for students in the general education classroom, small group or individual instruction in the resource room.

### **Access in the Mainstream Setting (AIMS):**

AIMS is designed to support students with needs in sensory, social, communication and/or behavior in general education settings. Most students receiving support in AIMS have a primary diagnosis of Autism. This model is to increase time in a general education setting with students who would otherwise be in a self-contained setting.

- Goals:
  - Students will build adaptive, communication and social/emotional skills that allows them to be successful learners by both meeting their IEP goals and grade level standards.

- School staff will identify best practice methods within their learning environment when instructing students with a primary disability of autism.
- Education is provided across all grade levels to promote autism awareness.
- Services
  - Students receiving AIMS support receive services through a: special education teacher, special education paraprofessional, speech language pathologist, and an occupational therapist
  - Instruction in social/emotional and academics are all taught in a general education classroom.
  - Collaboration on academic and behavioral support between general education teachers, AIMS special education teacher, AIMS paraprofessionals, and school staff.

### **Highly Capable Learners:**

Highly Capable (HCL) students are those who perform or show potential to perform at significantly advanced academic levels, as compared with others their own age. Performance is determined by referral, academic and cognitive abilities testing.

The Bellingham School District has established HCL Program Goals and a service delivery model that is used across the district. Essential elements of this HCL Program include:

- Goals: Each highly capable student will be provided appropriate services and support...
  - To assure HCL student's academic growth commensurate with their aptitude.
  - To maintain a high level of engagement in educational programming K-12.
  - To develop personal competence leading to exceptional academic achievement; social competence manifested in positive peer relationships; social responsibility and leadership skills.
  - To demonstrate advanced and complex learning in their area(s) of talent (i.e. critical thinking, problem solving, divergent thinking....).
- Student Learning Plans: Each highly capable student has an individual learning plan. These plans are:
  - Collaboratively developed by the teacher, Highly Capable Program Liaison, parent and student.
  - Reviewed and updated regularly to reflect the needs of the child.
- Continuum of Services K-12 and Service Delivery Options:
  - Kindergarten – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade
    - Primary students will be served in their classrooms using a developmentally appropriate approach that includes clustering, differentiation and single subject acceleration. The classroom teacher, parents and liaison will design a plan based on the unique characteristics of each child.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grades
    - Intermediate students will be served in their area of talent in their classrooms using clustering, differentiation and single subject acceleration. The classroom teacher, parents and liaison will design a plan based on the unique characteristics of each child. The classroom teacher will be supported by the liaison in implementing the plan.

Inquiry-based instruction allows advanced learners to adapt or extend content to their appropriate level of challenge. It provides multiple opportunities for these students to think critically, experience rigorous content, extend learning in areas of interest and demonstrate their knowledge through open-ended tasks. Additionally, these students develop and apply important life-long skills through the Approaches to Learning: thinking, social, communication, self-management and research skills. Through the PYP, our more advanced students have opportunity to challenge themselves, each other and positively influence the learning of all students in their classroom community.

### **Counseling Services**

Some students are in need of socio-emotional support in order to ensure learning through the PYP and success in school. We view these children as also having special needs. Counseling services are available for these students and their families, who do not have to meet formal eligibility requirements, but are often identified by a teacher or parent. The goal of counseling services at Northern Heights is to ensure that students have basic needs met and are emotionally and behaviorally ready to access learning. Our counseling program is both preventative and proactive in nature yet remains responsive to immediate needs that arise.

Services available to students and their families include:

- Inclusive classroom lessons provided by the classroom teacher through our Caring Schools Community curriculum,
- Inclusive classroom lessons provided by the school counselor on bullying prevention and problem solving,
- Individual and school-wide behavioral problem solving with staff, students and parents,
- Collaboration with classroom teachers to develop and manage intervention plans
- Communication of and support for our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) structure,
- Integration of PYP principles, including attributes of the Learner Profile, through counseling interactions, as appropriate
- 1:1 and small group work on specific areas of need such as self-regulation, social communication and cooperative play skills,
- Crisis response including support for grief and trauma,
- Connections to outside agencies and resources for families who need long term support.

### **Support for Staff**

General education teaching staff is supported in their efforts to provide inclusive learning environments and appropriate differentiated instruction for their students. Support comes in multiple ways through:

- Professional development on strategies for differentiated instruction, including assessment,
- Collegial collaboration with general and special needs staff,
- Instructional coaching and co-teaching,
- Progress monitoring and Student Growth Conferences,
- Consultation with program specialists (Counseling, LAP Reading, ELL, Sped, HCL),
- Problem Solving, Child Study Team processes, MDT referral processes, and
- District-level support and consultation.

Special needs teaching staff are supported in many of the same ways as classroom teachers. Additional supports available to them include:

- Professional development specific to their program or area of responsibility: conferences, workshops and district-provided,
- Professional Development in the PYP through PYP workshops,
- Professional Learning Community activities with like specialists,
- District program managers.

### **Support for Families**

Families of students with special needs have access to information and program support at the school and district level. Parents are informed of program availability and referral processes in the Bellingham School District *Family Handbook and Calendar*, which is mailed to all families in August of each school year. At Northern Heights we connect with families through written and in-person communication. Examples of these communications include:

- Our school handbooks with staff and program introductions,
- Fall open house,
- Ongoing home communication through Seesaw,
- Our school website,
- Parent education opportunities,
- Individual conferences,
- Meetings with other school staff/administrators,
- Differentiated materials shared at home,
- Referrals to community partners for counseling, tutoring, crisis management, basic needs,
- Connections with parent groups that are identified by special need.

### **SEN Policy Review Process**

This Special Needs Policy is a working document that will require review and revision as development and implementation of the PYP progresses at Northern Heights. To formalize the timeline and process for review and revision the following will be adopted:

- Annual review of content and working agreements, to be conducted in the spring of each school year by the leadership team.
- Subsequent sharing of revisions and review with all staff to be completed during the fall of the following school year.
- Involvement from stakeholder representatives in the review, revision process (i.e. grade level, support staff, parent/community, IB Coordinator, administration)
- Consensus support from all instructional staff and support staff charged with implementing the policy.