

# TRI-COUNTY SPECIAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

## **I. Regulatory Authority**

Providing legal authority and definition to the following descriptions of programs and services are regulations for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (34 CFR, Parts 300 & 301) and Illinois regulations (23 IL Administrative Code, Part 226).

## **II. Overview**

- A. Most special education students, ages 3-21, receive all necessary special education and related services in their own districts. However, partnerships make it possible for Tri-County Special Education Association to provide member districts with access to a wide variety of increasingly specialized programs and services. Most fundamentally, all Tri-County districts agreed to accept tuition students from other Tri-County districts if space is available and as long as the programming is appropriate.
- B. Programs include the classrooms, teachers, materials, equipment, and instruction needed to foster and measure student learning. Services support instruction—making it more effective. Support services include psychological services, social work services, speech-language pathology, occupational and/or physical therapy, consultation services, collaborative problem solving, behavioral support, technical assistance, professional development, assistive technology, administrative support, and much more.
- C. Before special education programs and services begin for any student, a comprehensive evaluation must be planned, conducted, and reviewed by a team of people. Evaluation results are used to determine the existence, nature, and educational needs associated with individual students' disabilities. Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) are then written to describe the special education and related services needed by every student whose disabilities have a documented adverse effect on learning. Eligibility and IEP decisions are made and written by IEP teams that are comprised of both parents and educators. Finally, parents must give consent before initial placement into special education programs or services.

## **III. Policies on Admissions and Dismissals**

- A. Students are eligible for special education when an IEP team determines they have a disability that adversely affects school performance to such a degree that appropriate rates of progress are not possible without special education intervention. Eligibility criteria based upon state and federal definitions are found elsewhere in this manual. Students are found eligible for related services after a multidisciplinary team concludes that they need those services to benefit from special education programming.

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- B. Students are dismissed from special education services when those services are no longer needed for them to benefit from the standard program or when they are no longer considered disabled. Similarly, students are dismissed from related services when those services are no longer considered necessary for them to benefit from special education programming.
- C. Procedures regarding eligibility for and dismissal from (termination or exit) special education services are found elsewhere in the Policies and Procedures Manual.

### IV. Special Education Programs

- A. Specialized instruction is provided for students with disabilities in every one of Tri-County's 15 member districts. All districts employ special education teachers who (a) consult with general education teachers to adapt the standard classroom for individual learning needs, (b) provide students with the individualized support needed for them to be successful in general education classrooms, (c) provide students with specialized instruction in either a general education or a special education classroom, (d) communicate with parents and other educators, and (e) implement the individualized educational plans of special education students. Special education teachers who perform these varied and highly personalized roles are often called "resource teachers."
- B. All 15 Tri-County districts have cross-categorical special education programs. This means that students are grouped according to specific academic and social needs, not on the basis of which disability entitles them to special education.
- C. All 15 districts also employ or contract with speech-language pathologists who provide special education and related services to students who have, or at risk of, speech-language impairments. Specialized instruction for many students with speech-language impairment might be therapy. Therapy may be delivered individually, in small groups, in a general education classroom, or in another location such as the community.
- D. All elementary and unit districts provide early childhood special education (ECSE) programs for students with disabilities who are age 3-5 and who require specialized instruction. Most districts provide these classrooms within the boundaries of their own districts, but three small elementary districts cooperate with one another to provide the classroom in one location. Specifically, both West Lincoln-Broadwell District #92 and New Holland-Middletown District #88 send students to the ECSE program operated by Chester-East Lincoln District #61.
- E. Most Tri-County districts provide pre-kindergarten classrooms for children, age 3-5, who are at-risk of having disabilities or learning difficulties in school. These classrooms are usually called At-Risk Pre-K or Pre-K classrooms and are funded

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through a state grant called an Early Childhood Block Grant as part of the Illinois Preschool for All program. In some locations, Pre-K and ECSE classrooms are combined.

- F. Many districts maintain instructional special education programs. This means that students spend more than half of their school day in a special education classroom, receiving specialized instruction separate from non-disabled peers. Students infrequently need this intense level of specialized instruction, but it is important to some students for a variety of different reasons. Most instructional programs put intensive effort into teaching the standard curriculum that is found in general education classrooms, other instructional programs focus more on teaching functional, or life, skills so that students with severe or multiple disabilities gain maximum independence. Regardless of the original program design, instructional special education teachers must adjust the level and nature of instruction to meet the specific needs of the students they teach.
- G. Most instructional programs in Tri-County districts are cross-categorical, meaning that the students may have different disabilities that make them eligible for special education but do have similar needs in terms of peer group, curriculum, classroom structure, instruction, organizational support, or social/emotional services. The following districts most frequently educate students from other member districts: Lincoln Elementary District #27, Lincoln Community High School #404, Chester-East Lincoln, District #61, and Tri-Valley District #3.
- H. Both Lincoln Elementary District #27 and Lincoln Community High School #404 maintain cross-categorical instructional programs for students who need primarily (a) academic support in the standard curriculum, (b) behavioral or social-emotional support and the standard curriculum, and (c) curricular and instructional support that has a functional or life skills focus and easy access to both specialized equipment and services for students who have multiple disabilities. Lincoln Elementary serves students through Grade 8 (typically ages 3-14) while Lincoln High school serves students in grades 9-12 (typically ages 15-21).
- I. Chester-East Lincoln District #61 makes the early childhood special education program described above available to students from New Holland-Middletown #88 and West Lincoln-Broadwell #92.
- J. Tri-Valley District #3 maintains instructional programs at the middle and high school levels for students who have multiple disabilities, or cognitive disabilities that require access to a functional or life skills curriculum, community-based instruction, specialized equipment, and highly specialized related services.
- K. Other special education programs are made available to Tri-County districts through Tri-County's collaborations with area educational organizations, most notably the Heart of Illinois Low Incidence Association (HILIA). HILIA is a

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joint agreement formed for the purpose of providing specialized educational services to students with hearing, vision, and motor disabilities. Membership in HILIA includes Bloomington District #87, Illinois State University (ISU) Laboratory Schools, Livingston County Special Services Unit, Mackinaw Valley Special Education Association, and Tri-County Special Education Association. The Regional Office of Education #17 serves as fiscal agent for HILIA and also operates Regional Alternative Schools on behalf of HILIA members. The following is a list of regional, public school programs that serve students with disabilities:

1. Metcalf and University High School programs (ISU) for students (age 3-21) with hearing and vision impairments.
  2. Early Childhood Special Education program at Metcalf School (ISU) for students with multiple impairments.
  3. Regional Alternative Program in Bloomington for McLean and DeWitt County students who meet the criteria for SAFE School program admittance (multiple suspensions, expulsion, weapons, or drugs) and have minimal special education needs.
  4. Special Education SAVE/Interim Alternate Educational Program for special education students within Tri-County who require emergency placement into a highly effective special education program and meet the criteria for SAFE School admittance listed in #3 above.
  5. Salt Creek Academy, Regional Alternative School for Logan County. Districts sending IEP students to this SAFE School program make special provisions for meeting individual special education needs while students are in this setting. Again, the same criteria for admittance to a SAFE School program apply.
- L. High quality non-public day treatment facilities are also available in Bloomington-Normal, Champaign-Urbana, Springfield, and Peoria. These programs specialize in the education of students with disabilities. Residential services, homebound services, home-hospital services, and extended school year services are all available when IEP teams conclude they are necessary.

### **V. Student Services**

- A. Support services add value to educational programs by making them more effective at fostering and measuring student learning. Such services may be provided directly to students, helping them to participate and learn more easily. Some direct services may be embedded into the classroom instruction that is provided all learners in small or large groups. Other direct services must be provided to individuals or small groups of learners with parent permission.

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Finally, still other support services benefit students indirectly because they are provided to the educators, parents, and other adults to who are responsible for student instruction.

- B. When support services are deemed necessary for an individual student with a disability to benefit from special education, they become an entitlement and are called related services. Related services are carefully defined by state and federal law. Related services are provided to students with disabilities or to their families. Student-focused teams, called IEP teams, determine the amount and the types of related services that needed by individual learners, then write services into Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Related services are essential, not merely optimal, for learning and are designed to achieve educational benefit. Medical services are not provided, nor approved, by IEP teams in schools. This is true even though school and medical personnel often communicate, with parent permission, to achieve greater benefit for individual children.
  
- C. Tri-County Special Education Association employs personnel who can provide the following services to support student learning:
  - 1. Administrative Services.
  - 2. School Psychology Services.
  - 3. School Social Work Services.
  - 4. Speech-Language Pathology Services.
  - 5. Occupational Therapy Services.
  - 6. Physical Therapy Services.
  - 7. Professional Development and Community Education Services.
  - 8. Prevention and Early Intervening Services.
  
- D. In addition, Tri-County partners with other agencies or educational organizations to provide intensive services on behalf of students with highly specialized needs in Tri-County schools:
  - 1. Program Facilitators (technical assistance and program consultation) and other specialized services (e.g., audiology, orientation and mobility) available through HILIA to support the learning needs of students with Vision, Hearing, and Orthopedic Impairments.
  - 2. Program Consultation for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities or Autism in Tri-County Schools from Hammitt School of The Baby Fold.

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3. Partners' Outreach Services for families who desire ongoing support, offered in collaboration with Hammitt School of The Baby Fold.
4. Assistive Technology Rentals, Consultation, and Support Services available from Tri-County, all HLIA districts, Infinitec, and the Mid-State Assistive Technology Coalition.

### **VI. Descriptions of Tri-County Services**

#### **A. Administrative Services**

1. Funds from many sources support the provision of special education and related services: federal (competitive and noncompetitive grants; Medicaid reimbursements), state (primarily pupil and personnel reimbursements), and local (local tax dollars). The management of funds from diverse sources is one important administrative service provided to districts.
2. The collection, verification, and reporting of special education data is mandated by both the state and federal governments. Data management services allow districts to receive federal funds, submit claims for state reimbursements, monitor indicators of program quality, anticipate service needs, and inform the public.
3. Tri-County assists districts with the implementation of special education policies and procedures. One notable example is supporting the management of students' special education records.
4. Technical assistance supervision means providing the specialized information and resources needed by districts to provide effective, efficient, and legal services to students with disabilities; assisting IEP teams with identifying, adapting, or implementing appropriate educational programs or services for individual students; and communicating with a variety of educational, community, or parent groups. Technical assistance supervision includes consultation on a variety of educational topics: policies and procedures, state and federal requirements, instructional or assessment methods, specific disabilities, program configurations, conducting needs assessments, designing or re-designing programs and services, among others. Tri-County employs administrators, including Technical Assistance Supervisors, who provide these services with greater intensity in assigned districts. Most recently, Tri-County administrators have been leading programming initiatives that use assistive or instructional technology to increase student learning and ease student participation in school activities. Specific assistive technology services include consultation, accessing equipment rentals, teaching software or

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tool use, accessing consultation services from knowledgeable peers, and accessing highly specialized services from other sources.

### B. School Psychology Services

1. Psychologists are assigned to specific Tri-County schools and collaborate with school personnel to promote student learning. Psychologists are most often recognized for the evaluations they conduct so that IEP teams can identify students with disabilities, but they perform a wide variety of services that are equally as important for students in the schools they support: consultation about student needs, participation on student assistance teams, screening, evaluations, program planning, functional assessment and behavior management planning, monitoring the academic or social progress of individual or small groups of children, teaching social skills, leading therapy groups, counseling individual children, leading workshops or providing technical assistance on specific topics, or collaborating with teachers to implement and measure the impact of new student services. School psychologists in Tri-County are currently helping districts to create early intervening services (see below) for students who need extra support if they are to become fluent readers and effective writers.
2. School psychologists are directly employed and supervised by Tri-County. A job description for school psychologists is found in another section of this handbook.

### C. School Social Work Services

1. School Social Workers are assigned to specific Tri-County schools for the purpose of providing a wide variety of support services designed to model collaboration and help students come to school ready to learn. Examples of services that are most often performed by school social workers include consultation with educators and families about individual student needs, informing family members about and involving them in special education services, helping families to access needed community or medical services, participating in student assistance teams, screening, evaluation, program planning, teaching social skills, leading therapeutic groups, providing individual counseling, linking students to appropriate mental health services, communicating about and coordinating multiple services for specific students, educating the public about special education, leading workshops, and providing technical assistance on specific topics. School social workers in Tri-County are currently leading a number of initiatives related to supporting families of students who have disabilities: co-teaching workshops with Tri-County parents so that other parents better understand special education, co-teaching Love and Logic workshops to provide Tri-County parents with common parent education experiences,

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and supporting the work of a new position--parent mentor for Tri-County and a state-wide project called The Parent Educator Partnership. School social workers also lead efforts to develop early intervening services (see below) for the purpose of preparing young children for success in kindergarten.

2. School social workers are directly employed and supervised by Tri-County. A job description for school social workers is found in another section of this handbook.

### D. Speech-Language Pathology Services

1. Speech-language pathologists provide screening, evaluation, therapy, classroom support, technical assistance, program consultation, and many other services that allow students to communicate effectively with others. New to Tri-County is a technical assistance supervisor responsible for speech-language services and a cooperative-wide initiative to revise eligibility criteria, forms, and a guidance manual for use by all speech-language pathologists in Tri-County schools.
2. Most Tri-County districts directly employ their own speech-language pathologists, but member districts have the option of contracting for this service through the cooperative. As a result, some speech-language pathologists are employed by Tri-County but supervised collaboratively with administrators in the districts to which they are assigned. A job description is found elsewhere in this handbook.

### E. Occupational Therapy

1. Occupational Therapy services are designed to help students overcome medically-related limitations that impact school performance. Tri-County employs Occupational Therapists and Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants to provide a full range of school-based services: consultation, screening, evaluation, program planning, therapy, technical assistance, and leading occasional workshops or clinics to teach specific skills to children and the adults who work with them. Occupational therapy services may be provided to individual or small groups of students who have related needs. The publication Recommended Practices for Occupational and Physical Therapy in Illinois Schools (ISBE, 2003) guides therapy decisions in Tri-County districts.
2. Occupational therapists and therapy assistants are employed and supervised by the cooperative, but services are provided to member districts on a contractual basis. If time permits, services may be contracted to school districts outside the cooperative. Job descriptions are found elsewhere in this handbook.

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### F. Physical Therapy

1. Physical Therapy services are designed to help students develop the physical skills needed to safely and effectively participate in school activities. Tri-County employs Physical Therapists and Physical Therapy Assistants to provide a full-range of school-based services: consultation on equipment or classroom modifications, screening, evaluation, program planning, therapy, technical assistance, and leading occasional workshops or clinics to teach specific content to the adults who work with children. Physical therapy is most often delivered to individual students and not in small groups. The publication Recommended Practices for Occupational and Physical Therapy in Illinois Schools (ISBE, 2003) guides therapy decisions in Tri-County districts.
2. Physical therapists and therapy assistants are employed and supervised by the cooperative, but services are provided to member districts on a contractual basis. If time permits, services may be contracted to school districts outside the cooperative. Job descriptions are found elsewhere in this handbook.

### G. Professional Development and Community Education Activities

1. A comprehensive set of professional development, or in-service, activities are provided annually for Tri-County educators. Policies and procedures, assistive technology, instructional methods, mental health needs or services, and student assessment are topics that are most frequently addressed through professional development.
2. Community members, especially those who work in community agencies and those who are parents of children with disabilities, are frequently involved in learning activities offered through Tri-County. A parent mentor was recently employed by Tri-County and the Academic Development Institute in Lincoln. A state grant funds the parent mentor position for the purpose of supporting parents whose children receive special education services. Parent understanding, parent involvement, community awareness, expanding educational and community opportunities for students with disabilities, and maintaining strong, positive relationships between parents and educators are the goals of the parent mentor and the parent group that advises her. The parent mentor works in conjunction with a state-wide project called the Parent Educator Partnership.

### H. Prevention and Early Intervening Services

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1. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 uses the term “Early Intervening Services” to describe support services that are used to meet the many academic and social needs experienced by learners in general education. The purpose of early intervening services is to correct or accommodate learning needs before it becomes necessary to identify children as having a disability or before the adverse effects of disabilities become severe. In other words, early intervening services are about prevention and early intervention so that students can be taught the skills they need to be successful in school.
2. Many of the support services provided by psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and Tri-County administrators may be accurately labeled as early intervening services. The development and maintenance of student assistance teams, called A-Teams, is one example of early intervening services that have become firmly established in Tri-County schools. Tri-County and district service providers use their time and organize their services in a way that is flexible, legal, and effective for meeting a variety of student needs whether students have disabilities or not.
3. Tri-County psychologists are currently working with schools who wish to develop alternative services for students who need extra instruction in early literacy skills. School social workers, psychologists, administrators, speech-language pathologists, and community partners are finding multiple ways to support the families of young children and to teach skills that will make those young children better prepared for kindergarten.
4. Districts provide support services to general education in many ways—and they always have. Teachers, administrators, volunteers, counselors, nurses, parents, and community members all provide these services.
5. The next section of this handbook, Response to Intervention, addresses the priorities and timeline for implementing a comprehensive set of early intervening services in public schools throughout the cooperative.

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