



Book	Administrative Regulations
Section	700: Students
Title	Special Programs Entrance and Application Criteria
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## **STUDENTS**

### **Administrative Regulation - Special Programs: Application and Entrance Criteria**

The Rockford Public Schools offers special program opportunities to students who: a) are gifted and talented academically or in an area of fine arts; b) interested in two way language immersion (TWI) or pursuing learning in the areas of science, technology, engineering, arts or math (STEAM Academy or Jefferson Industrial Technology) or c) desire a non-traditional educational structure, e.g. Maria Montessori, JROTC, Sign Language. These programs are referred to in this regulation as "Special Program(s)".

Each Special Program shall form an oversight committee composed of teachers, related service providers and District and program administrators. The oversight committee shall meet periodically to review and make recommendations regarding the Special Program. This includes review of: best practices in like programs nationally; community outreach activities; District and Special Program specific entrance criteria, application and selection procedures; Special Program expectations and support services; and student progress.

The Special Programs Department and the principal of each school housing a Special Program or their designee(s) are responsible for the development and publication of information to parents, students, and the broader community regarding the entrance criteria, program expectations and supports, and the procedures governing the identification, selection and assignment of qualifying students to the Special Program to which the student applied, consistent with the following minimum procedures and applicable Board policies.

### **Non-discrimination**

All procedures and assessment tools, if any, utilized to identify and select qualifying students for assignment to a Special Program shall be non-discriminatory and, where applicable, take into consideration cultural and socio-economic factors that may impede the participation of otherwise eligible students.

Reasonable accommodations that do not impair the validity of assessment results shall be made available to applicants who are students with disabilities or English Learners, consistent with the requirements of State and federal law and District policies.

Informational materials or presentations regarding Special Programs should take into consideration the need to notify parents, students and community members of accessibility assistance available for individuals with disabilities or limited English proficiency and how to access those services.

### **Prohibited Inquiries/Procedures.**

Special Program applications and procedures may not ask for or take into consideration as part of program entrance criteria and procedures:

1. Social security numbers;
2. Information regarding receipt of public assistance of any kind, e.g. food stamps, Medicaid, school fee waivers; or
3. A student's discipline history, other than verification of the student being in good standing, as set forth below.

Inquiries regarding a student's race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, disability or language capabilities may be collected for statistical

purposes only. This information shall not be considered in determining Special Program eligibility, except that language capabilities may be considered when an essential component of the program and the criteria is applied to all applicants.

### **Good Standing.**

Students must be in good standing at the time of assignment to the special program. Good standing for this purpose means that the student is not subject to a suspension or an expulsion whose time period has not yet expired at the time of assignment and who does not receive an out-of-school disciplinary consequence at any time thereafter up to the student's first day of attendance in the Special Program.

### **Identification Procedures**

#### 1. Community Outreach/Referrals/Screening.

a. Community Outreach. Each Special Program principal or his/her designee, in coordination with the Special Programs Department, shall develop a plan for informing the Rockford Public Schools and Rockford area community about the Special Program, its entrance criteria, program expectations and supports; screening, referral, application and selection procedures; and how to obtain further information.

Materials are to be distributed throughout the District schools and may be included in parent/student handbooks, curriculum guides, newsletters, brochures and/or flyers and the like. Informational materials also may be made accessible through the District and schools' websites and at the District's Welcome Center.

Particular attention should be made to consider alternative means of community outreach to populations for whom barriers to participation have been identified.

#### b. Application and Information Requests.

Special Program applications and information will be made available for any student or child who will be of school attendance age who may or will be enrolling and/or registering in the Rockford Public Schools in the current school year or by the first day of student attendance in the year following application who meets the preliminary screening criteria, if any. To the extent the Special Program utilizes an on-line application procedure, the Special Program also must have an alternative means for applying that can be utilized by individuals who prefer to apply by other than electronic means.

#### c. Non-resident Students.

Students who qualify for a similar Special Program in another school district, whether in or out-of-state, must apply to and be found eligible for the District's program; they may not be grandfathered into or given priority consideration for program entrance.

#### d. Screening.

i. Universal Screening. Each Special Program may establish universal screening procedures relevant to their special program focus to identify potential program candidates for purposes of targeted outreach and program promotion. A universal screening is one given to all District students that fall within a neutral classification, for which parental consent is not required, e.g. all third grade students. Criteria established for screening result thresholds shall be clearly established prior to the screening taking place.

Universal screenings, when implemented, minimally shall occur one time per regular school year, with at least one opportunity for a make-up session for students with an excused absence at the time of the regularly scheduled universal screening. The same threshold criteria as relied upon for the universal screening for current students shall be used for the screening of transfer students.

Individualized Screening. Special Programs may establish an individualized, existing information based screening procedure for program referrals or program inquiries received to ensure that the student meets minimum threshold requirements warranting completion of an application.

Threshold requirements are to be established in advance and published to parents, students and the broader school community prior to the screening taking place. Individualized screenings can be a stand-alone screening or part of a multi-step screening procedure used in conjunction with a universal screening

Denial of an Application. Any decision to deny an application based on a preliminary screening shall be provided to the parent and student, in writing, and document the basis of the determination as well as notice of how to request review of that decision.

### **2. Application.**

a. To the extent practicable, the Director of Special Programs or his/her designee shall develop a uniform or similar application for use by all Special Programs. This application may have specific subparts that are applicable to one or more but not all Special Programs or be utilized in conjunction with separate, supplemental application requirements so long as the Special Program using

supplemental application requirements has published those requirements in advance of consideration of any applicant for the upcoming selection window.

b. Selection Methodology. Each Special Program shall include the manner by which acceptance is determined when there are more qualified applicants at any particular grade level than seats available, e.g. date/time of application, highest ranking applicant score or lottery.

3. Entrance Criteria. Entrance criteria and processes are posted on the webpage for each special program.

a. Testing. Any standardized testing to be utilized as part of the entrance criteria considerations shall be offered at least once per regular school year, with at least one make up session for students who have an excused absence on the day of the test. If tests are offered on non-school days, the student absence must be excused by the Director of Special Programs or his/her designee. Tests shall be selected based upon their ability to measure a student's aptitude in the area tested and align with tests approved by the Illinois State Board of Education when applicable, e.g. gifted programming, English Learner needs. Test fees, if any, shall be waived for resident students the first time they take the test.

b. Consent. Written or online parental consent shall be obtained prior to any testing being conducted.

c. Waiver of Testing or Audition. Students who have exited a Special Program voluntarily, as a result of an expulsion, or as a result of an IEP Team placement decision, and who request in writing re-entry to the same Special Program within 12 months of the date of exit may be considered for assignment to the Special Program without need for re-testing or re-auditioning. If a student is in the review and intervention process at the time of voluntary withdrawal, the review process and intervention plan will resume at the date of re-entry.

### **Selection.**

1. **Application Review.** Applications will be reviewed for compliance with the published entrance criteria.

2. **Eligibility Determination.** Student qualification for assignment to a Special Program shall be dependent upon the student having met the published entrance criteria in effect for the Special Program at the time of the application review, a seat being projected as being available at the student's grade level at the time of assignment and the student being in good standing at the time of actual assignment. For students with disabilities, the student's IEP or 504 Team also must verify the student can continue to receive a FAPE if assigned to the Special Program.

3. **Notification of Determination.** Parents and students shall be notified in writing of the outcome of their/their child's application review by a date or time frame identified in the application materials. Written notification may be by regular U.S. Mail or email (with parent permission). Any parent who does not have regular and reliable access to a secure means for retrieval of electronically delivered notification may ask for notice specifically by U.S. Mail or alternative means acceptable to the parent and District. Such notice must document the basis of the determination as well as provide details regarding how to request reconsideration, or appeal, the decision.

4. **Re-application.** Students who do not meet the eligibility criteria may reapply at any time for programs that require no assessments. For programs with testing as part of eligibility, students may apply once per year. Inquiries regarding areas in which the student would need to show improvement in order to meet the eligibility criteria may be requested from the Director of Special Programs or his/her designee.

### **Assignment.**

1. **Parent Consent for Placement.** Written parental consent is required for a qualified student to be placed in a Special Program following notification of acceptance. Students for whom written consent is not timely returned forfeit their opportunity for assignment at that time, absent extraordinary circumstances, e.g. natural disaster, death in the family, verified medical emergency, and may be waitlisted. The notice of acceptance and opportunity for assignment to a Special Program shall state in an obvious and highlighted manner the date by which written consent must be received by the District in order to reserve for the student a seat in the program.

2. **Wait Lists.** When there are more eligible students than Special Program seats available at any level, the Special Program may maintain a wait list, consistent with the procedures published for the Special Program.

3. **Students with Disabilities.** If a student who qualifies for assignment to a Special Program is a student with a disability, the student's IEP or 504 Team shall meet within a reasonable period of time of the eligibility determination to verify that the student will continue to receive a free appropriate public education if assigned to the Special Program and to modify the student's IEP or 504 plan as appropriate. A representative from the Special Program shall be a participant in the meeting. Such determination shall be made consistent with the controlling legal authority, and is to be conducted only after the identification and selection process have been completed. A student with a disability shall not be deemed assigned until such time as the student's IEP or 504 Team has met, and a seat will be held for the student pending completion of this meeting. However, the parent still must timely consent to the student's assignment to the Special Program by the time noted in the qualification letter, with the understanding that any resulting assignment to the Special Program is contingent on the IEP or 504 Team meeting outcome.

4. English Learners. If a student who qualifies for assignment to a Special Program also is identified as an English Learner, or the Student's parent(s) requests language accommodations, the parent(s), student, if applicable, and a representative of the Bilingual Department shall discuss the language supports necessary to provide the student and/or parent(s) with an equal opportunity to access and participate in the Special Program.

5. Registration. A student's assignment to a Special Program is not completed until such time as the parent enrolls and registers (nonresident student) or registers (returning resident student) the student.

6. Exited Students Seeking Re-entry. Students who have voluntarily exited a Special Program by choice, or as a result of a departure from the District, an expulsion, or an IEP Team placement decision, and who within 12 months (plus summer if at the end of a school year) of the date of exit request in writing to re-enter the same Special Program may be considered for priority assignment to the Special Program, if a seat is available at the time re-entry is requested and upon approval of the Steering Committee and, when applicable, IEP Team. All other exited students who seek re-entry will be considered within the Special Program's normal application procedures.

7. Home School Assignment. Once assigned, the Special Program is the student's home school so long as the student continues to meet the Special Program's published expectations and maintains uninterrupted attendance.

#### **Requests for Reconsideration/Appeal.**

1. Request Procedures. A request for reconsideration or appeal of any decision related to the screening, application or selection of a student may be made within 10 school days of the date of the notification to the parent/student of the decision. Any such request should be in writing, include the basis for the disagreement and be delivered to the Director of Special Programs. The Director of Special Programs shall consult with the Non-discrimination Coordinator and/or Executive Director of Special Education or his/her designee in regard to any complaint that includes allegations of discriminatory decision making.

2. Students with Disabilities. Otherwise qualified students with disabilities, additionally, may challenge an IEP or 504 Team determination(s) as related to delivery of services and/or placement in the Special Program by way of exercise of any of the procedural safeguards available under the controlling federal law or the District's Uniform Grievance Policy. Any such complaint shall be filed with both the Director of Special Programs and the Executive Director of Special Education or his/her designee.

#### **Miscellaneous**

1. Confidentiality of Information. Teacher recommendations submitted in support of a student's application, if any, remain confidential and are not accessible to parents or students, pursuant to the School Student Records Act, 105 ILCS 10/4.

2. Athletes. To the extent the Athletic Director is able to present fact sufficient to establish that the motive for a high school student's transfer into a Special Program is to participate in a particular sports program, the student shall not be eligible to participate in such sports program.

Cross References      [7.55 - Special Programs](#)