

## PHILOSOPHY OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

**The Lemont High School Special Education Department believes all students have the ability to develop knowledge and skills to reach their highest potential through creative, supportive and rigorous curriculum opportunities.**

The Special Education Department recognizes and addresses the unique learning needs of all students, giving them opportunities to participate in courses and services in order to maximize students' potential in the least restrictive environment.

Through programs and services, the Special Education Department strives to support students by:

- Providing diagnostic and assessments services to identify the strengths and learning needs of students who are referred for special education programming and services
- Designing a thorough, comprehensive Individualized Education Program (IEP) that gives eligible students the opportunities to develop skills and strategies to compensate for their needs and challenges
- Creating supportive learning environments that incorporate research based methodologies, technology applications, and resources designed to address the unique learning needs of all students
- Establishing relationships with students and families and assist them with preparing for postsecondary experiences related to education/training, employment and independent living
- Providing specially designed instruction and related services to address the learning needs of students as outlined in their IEPs
- Implementing a Resource Curriculum that fosters the development of executive functioning skills, self-advocacy skills and transition planning activities
- Offering a continuum of services for students eligible for special education services

All special education courses are aligned to Illinois Learning Standards. Students' placements are determined through the IEP process and reflect opportunities to learn and participate with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. Assessments to monitor progress and determine attainment of goals and objectives are incorporated into each IEP. The Special Education Department supports the school's mission: for all students to become life-long, independent learners and productive citizens in a rapidly changing world.

# Special Education

## CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

### General Education Classes with Supplemental Supports

A student with an individualized education program (IEP) who is in a general education class may receive individual accommodations and/or paraeducator support as part of the student's placement in their least restrictive environment (as outlined in the IEP). The IEP outlines specific accommodations tailored to the student's unique needs, ensuring equal access to the curriculum and a supportive learning environment. In the general education class, students may receive various individual accommodations, such as extended time for assignments or assessments, preferential seating, access to assistive technology, and other individualized accommodations in order to meet their needs. These accommodations are designed to help students fully participate in class activities and demonstrate their knowledge and skills while 'leveling the playing field'. Specific accommodations and level of paraeducator support may vary depending on the student's needs, as outlined in the IEP. The IEP team, including parents/guardians, teachers, and other relevant professionals, works collaboratively to ensure the student's individual needs are met, promoting their overall success and growth in the general education setting while providing the student free appropriate public education (FAPE).

### Related Services

Related services are a crucial component of an IEP. These services are provided to students with disabilities to support their educational progress and to ensure they can fully benefit from their educational program within their least restrictive environment.

### Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is an instructional model in which two or more educators, typically a general education teacher and a special education teacher, work together in a shared general education classroom to provide instruction to all students. It is a collaborative approach that promotes inclusive education and supports the diverse needs of students. In a co-teaching setting, teachers collaborate to plan, deliver, and assess instruction. They share responsibility for all students in the classroom, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The co-teachers work together to provide differentiated instruction and accommodations to meet the individual needs of students. Co-teaching can take on various forms, including:

**One Teach, One Observe:** One teacher leads the instruction while the other observes students' understanding and behavior to provide additional support or interventions as needed.

**Parallel Teaching:** The class is divided into two smaller groups, and each teacher delivers the same content simultaneously to provide more individualized attention.

**Station Teaching:** The class is divided into stations or learning centers and teachers rotate among the groups, providing instruction and support at each station.

**Alternative Teaching:** One teacher works with the majority of the students while the other works with a smaller group to provide more intensive instruction or address specific needs.

**Team Teaching:** Both teachers actively participate in instruction, sharing responsibility for planning, teaching, and assessing students together.

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## Instructional Classes

Self-contained or instructional classes provide the student with specialized instruction. These classes are designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities or learning challenges that cannot be fully addressed in a general education classroom. In a self-contained or instructional class, students with similar needs or disabilities are grouped together. These classes are typically smaller in size and have a higher teacher-to-student ratio to provide more individualized attention and support. The curriculum and instructional strategies are tailored to meet the specific learning goals and needs of the students in the class. The focus of self-contained or instructional classes is to provide intensive and specialized instruction in a structured environment. Instruction may include functional academics, academics tied to state standards, communication skills, social skills, self-help skills, executive functioning, and transition skills. The emphasis is on individualized instruction and progress monitoring to ensure students are making meaningful gains.

## Learning for Independence, Friendship, and Employment/Training (L.I.F.E.) Program

The L.I.F.E. Program is specially designed to cater to the unique needs of students with moderate to severe disabilities. This program aims to provide a nurturing and inclusive environment that fosters functional academics, employment/training opportunities, independent living skills, and dedicated support for communication and social needs. The L.I.F.E. Program was developed with this vision in mind, ensuring students with moderate to severe disabilities receive the necessary tools and support to succeed academically, professionally, and socially. Key features of the L.I.F.E. Program include:

**Functional Academics:** The curriculum is designed to integrate functional academics into everyday life scenarios. This approach allows students to apply their learning to real world situations, empowering them to become confident problem solvers.

**Employment/Training:** Vocational training and employment readiness are emphasized to equip students with the skills required for future career paths. Partnerships with local businesses provide internships, job shadowing, and mentorship opportunities that encourage independent living and enhance employability.

**Independent Living Skills:** The L.I.F.E. Program places a strong emphasis on developing essential independent living skills. Students are guided in areas such as personal care, household management, financial literacy, and transportation, fostering self-sufficiency and preparing them for life beyond the program.

Students go outside of the L.I.F.E. program for at least one elective (if not more) in the general education environment and attend a general education Lemont Time class once a week. Social workers, speech-language pathologists, and other related services providers work closely with students, providing individualized attention and tailored strategies to enhance their communication skills and overall well-being.

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## **ARC (Academics, Resilience, Character) Program**

The ARC program is an in-district therapeutic program specifically designed to support students with internalizing behaviors. Its primary goal is to support students in making progress towards their academic, social/emotional, executive functioning, communication, and transition goals as outlined in their IEPs. The program focuses on a holistic approach to education, recognizing that academic success is intertwined with emotional well-being and personal growth. By providing a supportive and therapeutic environment, the ARC program aims to help students develop a range of essential skills that contribute to their overall success and well-being. Students have the opportunity to enhance their self-esteem, develop a growth mindset, and cultivate empathy toward others. They are encouraged to think critically, which promotes analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The program also emphasizes distress tolerance and emotional regulation, providing students with strategies to manage and cope with challenging emotions effectively. Leadership skills, such as communication, collaboration, and decision-making, are nurtured within the ARC program. Students are encouraged to take initiative, become self-advocates, and demonstrate leadership qualities both within the program and in their broader school community. Lastly, gratitude is another important aspect of the ARC program. Students are encouraged to cultivate a sense of appreciation for their own abilities, the support they receive, and the opportunities provided to them. Students in this program receive social work services individually and in a group setting.

## **Southwest Cook County Cooperative**

The Southwest Cook County Cooperative Association for Special Education (SWCCCASE) is an organization that collaborates with member school districts in Illinois to provide specialized educational services to students with disabilities. SWCCCASE recognizes that some students require more restrictive placements to meet their unique needs. In these cases, the district utilizes the Cooperative for more specialized and restrictive placements. Additionally, SWCCCASE offers a Transition Program that focuses on preparing students with disabilities for life after high school. The Transition Program is designed to support students ages 18-22 as they transition from school to post-secondary education, and/or vocational training, employment, and independent living.

## **Separate Facility Placements**

In the event an IEP team decides that a student's needs cannot be met at Lemont High School or the Southwest Cooperative, out-of-district placements may be explored by the team in order to provide the student free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment for that student.

## **Future Connections Program**

The Future Connections Program is an in-district fifth-year program, designed for students who completed their four years of high school but still require a coordinated set of activities, services, and specialized instruction in the areas of academics, employment, and independent living in order to make progress towards their post secondary outcomes as outlined in their IEPs. Students are required to attend the Future Connections program Monday-Friday when they are not in attendance for college-level courses, courses at the Wilco Area Career Center, or competitive work.