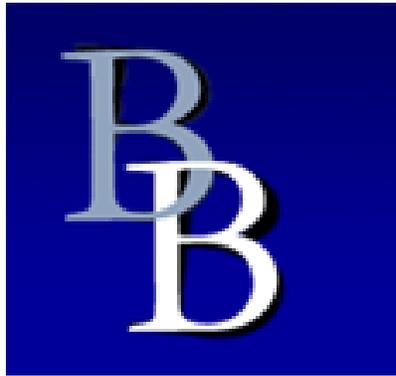


Blind Brook
Student Support Services
Handbook



2025-2026 School Year

Dear Families,

Welcome to our Student Support Handbook!

In Blind Brook, we believe that every child is unique and deserves the support they need to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. This handbook has been thoughtfully created to serve as a helpful guide and reference for the many support services available to students and families within our school community.

While special education is one of the more well-known services, it is just one part of a broad continuum of support designed to assist *all* students—whether or not they have a formal classification. As your child moves through their educational journey from kindergarten to graduation, their needs may change, and we are here to meet them every step of the way.

We encourage you to use this handbook to better understand the resources available and to reach out with any questions or concerns. Our goal is to partner with you to ensure that every student feels supported, valued, and empowered to succeed.

Thank you for being a part of our school community. We are here for you—and we look forward to working together to support your child's growth.

Warmly,

Leadership Team

Introduction

This handbook describes and serves as a reference for the various support services that the District uses to address all students' needs. Although special education is the most widely known of these services, there are many other supports available for non-classified students as needs arise. The needs of each student are unique and may change as the student progresses from kindergarten through graduation.

The services described here form a continuum of support that allows all students to receive the level of service that is appropriate for their academic, social, and emotional growth.

District Administrators

Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School

Principal Tracy Taylor

Assistant Principal Teresa Letizia

Blind Brook Middle School

Principal Seth Horowitz

Assistant Principal Karen Chalif

Blind Brook High School

Principal Mark Greenwald

Assistant Principal James Quigley

Pupil Personnel Services

Director of PPS, Alexandra LaFontaine-Casabona

Assistant Director of PPS, Jennifer Castelli

Overview: District Student Support Services

The majority of students (about 80%) are appropriately supported through differentiated instruction and the varied curriculum offered within the general education classroom, as well as grade-level and school-wide programs. However, some students will require interventions and support beyond regular instruction.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) – Building Level Supports

MTSS is designed to address the needs of students who are struggling academically, socially, or behaviorally through building-level interventions. These supports are often short-term and targeted, including teacher academic assistance periods, Academic Intervention Services (AIS), counseling, and other remedial strategies. Students are monitored for progress, and interventions are adjusted as needed to help them succeed in the general education curriculum.

Section 504 – Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal civil rights law that ensures students with disabilities have equal access to education. Under Section 504, eligible students may receive accommodations and support that remove barriers to learning and allow them to fully participate in school programs and activities. The primary purpose of Section 504 is to equalize access to education, not to modify curriculum or expectations.

To qualify, there must be documentation of a physical or mental impairment, which may include a medical diagnosis when relevant to understanding the student's needs. Section 504 plans are not permanent and do not automatically roll over from year to year. Each plan is reviewed periodically to determine if accommodations are still necessary to ensure equal access to learning opportunities.

Committee on Special Education- Individualized Education Program (IEP) – IDEA

The IEP, developed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), provides specially designed instruction and related services to eligible students with disabilities. A child may be found eligible if they meet the criteria under one of the 13 disability categories defined by IDEA (see appendix A) *and* if the disability impacts their educational performance or ability to make academic progress. The Committee on Special Education (CSE) conducts evaluations and, in collaboration with families, creates an IEP tailored to each student's unique strengths and needs. IEPs are reviewed at least once a year to monitor progress and make updates as needed. Services are delivered along a continuum of support, which may include resource room programs, integrated co-teaching, or special class settings.

Student Examples: MTSS, 504, IEP

It can be confusing to understand which services on the continuum best serve the needs of different students. To help differentiate among the three, we offer three illustrative scenarios:

1. Student Receiving MTSS

- Example: Sarah is a 2nd grader struggling with reading fluency and comprehension.
- Support Provided: Tier 2 interventions, small-group instruction, progress monitoring weekly.
- Criteria for Qualification:
 - Academic performance below grade-level benchmarks.
 - Not yet eligible for special education but needs additional support to succeed in the general education curriculum.
 - Data-driven decision: low scores on formative and summative assessments trigger additional interventions.

2. Student with a 504 Plan

- Example: Jordan is an 11th grader with Type 1 Diabetes. He needs to monitor blood sugar throughout the day and may require insulin injections or snacks during class.
- Accommodations Provided:
 - Permission to leave class for blood sugar checks or insulin administration.
 - Access to snacks and water as needed.
 - Extra time for tests if a low or high blood sugar episode occurs.
- Criteria for Qualification:
 - Student has a disability under Section 504 that substantially limits a major life activity (in this case, managing blood sugar and maintaining health).
 - Requires accommodations to access the general education curriculum safely, but does not require a modified curriculum or specialized instruction.
 - Eligibility is based on medical documentation and demonstration of the impact on learning or school participation.

3. Student with an IEP

- Example: Maya is a 7th grader with a learning disability in math and written expression.
- Services Provided: Direct consult in Math daily, speech and language 1x weekly Learning Center daily with goals in math and written expression.
- Criteria for Qualification:
 - Student meets eligibility under IDEA's 13 disability categories- Learning Disability
 - Requires specially designed instruction to make progress in the general education curriculum.
 - Eligibility is determined via a comprehensive evaluation, including academic, cognitive, and functional assessments

MTSS: Multi-Tiered System of Supports

The Blind Brook-Rye School District recognizes that students may encounter difficulties in school for a variety of reasons. Many of these challenges are episodic and can be effectively addressed through building-level supports and services. In the District, these supports are provided through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), which may include teacher academic assistance periods, Academic Intervention Services (AIS), counseling, and other short-term interventions.

The MTSS Team

The MTSS Team is a building-level group composed of administrators and faculty. The Team reviews students referred by teachers or building administrators who are experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties. The Team first examines the student's records and presents information to determine whether building-level supports can address the identified problem.

When support is implemented, the MTSS Team sets a review date to monitor the student's progress. Students may receive additional targeted interventions based on the Team's ongoing review and monitoring.

Please see the building level MTSS information here: [Ridge Street School Family Guidebook](#), [Blind Brook Middle School](#), [Blind Brook High School Family Guidebook](#) .

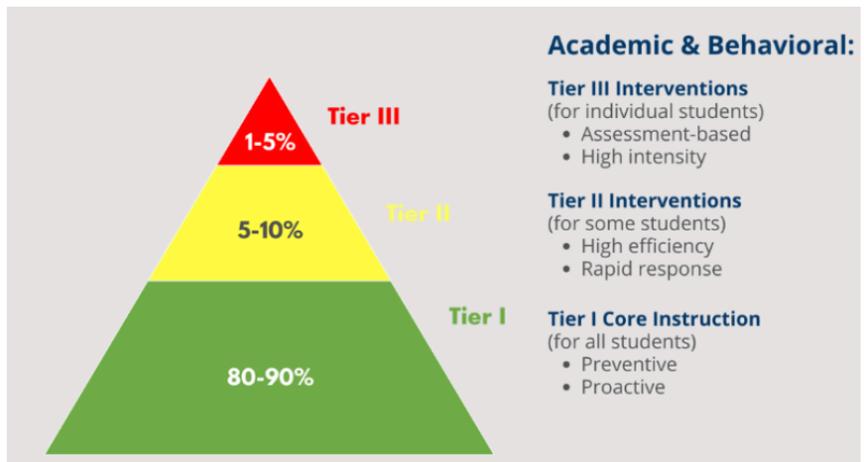
MTSS: Overview of Tier 1, 2, 3

Tier 1 – Universal Support

- Who: All students in the general education classroom.
- What: High-quality instruction and support that everyone receives.
- Purpose: Prevent problems and help all students succeed.
- Example:
 - Differentiated instruction in reading or math
 - Classroom routines and behavior expectations
 - Positive behavior reinforcement

Tier 2 – Targeted/Small Group Support

- Who: Students who are struggling despite Tier 1 support.
- What: Small group interventions, more focused support.



- Purpose: Provide extra help to prevent problems from becoming severe.
- Example:
 - Small reading groups or math intervention groups
 - Weekly check-ins for social-emotional skills
 - Targeted behavioral supports

Tier 3 – Intensive/Individualized Support

- Who: Students who have not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions.
- What: Individualized and intensive support, sometimes with specialists.
- Purpose: Address significant academic or behavioral challenges.
- Example:
 - One-on-one reading or math tutoring
 - Individual behavior intervention plans
 - Support from a special education teacher or counselor

Key Point: *Tier 3 is not the same as special education—it’s an intensive intervention to prevent the need for special education, but it also provides documentation that can support a referral if the student still needs more help*

**When a student is referred for Tier 2 or Tier 3 support, parents are notified in writing and receive regular progress updates. Services continue as long as the student is making progress toward grade-level expectations. If progress is insufficient, the MTSS Team may adjust interventions or increase the level of support to better meet the student’s needs.

Academic Intervention Services (AIS) are part of Tier 2 and Tier 3 support. AIS provides additional instruction to help students strengthen skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students may qualify for AIS based on state and district assessment results or through a referral by a teacher or parent. AIS is most commonly provided in English Language Arts and Mathematics, and parents are notified in writing if their child is referred for or qualifies for these services.

Students receiving support through the MTSS framework are closely monitored and assessed regularly, typically every six to eight weeks, to track progress. In addition, all students in grades K–8 are assessed at least three times per year in reading and mathematics to ensure that interventions are effective and students are making progress.

Section 504 Committee (§504)

Students may be referred to the §504 Team by their parents, guardians, or by a designee of the district where the student resides.

All referrals must be in writing to the building administration and school counselor.

Upon receipt of a referral, you will be asked to fill out a referral form found [here](#). The 504 Team will then process the referral and gather the student's records, observations, and any additional evaluations, and schedule an initial 504 meeting.

The 504 Committee is responsible for evaluating a student to determine whether the student has a disability that substantially interferes with a major life activity and, if so, to prepare a 504 Plan that provides accommodations and supports to give the student equal access to the school's programs and activities. Please see Appendix B for a Checklist for Determining Disabilities under 504.

For students who manifest no symptoms, whether due to remission or the ameliorative effects of medication, the District remains obligated to determine whether the disability, if not controlled, would substantially limit a major life activity and, if so, recognize the student as disabled with protection against discrimination. In cases where a student requires accommodations and/or supports to access the District's programs or services, including education, the Team must prepare a 504 Accommodation Plan.

Unlike the Committee on Special Education, where both membership and initial assessments are prescribed by law, 504 provides flexibility in terms of both the committee membership and required testing. The 504 Team requires, as members, a person familiar with the District's programs and services, a person knowledgeable about the child and his/her needs, and the child's parent.

Under 504, evaluations may involve a review of existing information, records, observations, and formal assessments only where necessary to determine the nature of the student's disability and the extent of the student's needs. Unlike the IDEA, which provides 60 calendar days from the date of consent to conduct an initial evaluation to offer an IEP, the Rehabilitation Act requires that evaluations and plans be completed within a reasonable time. As a matter of practice, however, it remains the District's goal to have 504 determinations and reviews completed within the same timelines that apply to the IDEA.

Unlike the IDEA, which requires an annual review meeting once a year, the 504 Team may meet annually, although that is not a requirement by law. The team is only required to meet periodically and prior to any significant change in placement.

CSE Referral, Student Evaluation, Eligibility, IEP Development and Review

Referral

Students may be referred to the Committee on Special Education (CSE) by their parents, guardians, or by a designee of the district where the student resides. In Blind Brook, designees include the building principals, the Assistant Director of Pupil Services, and the Director of Pupil Services. Additionally, professional staff, a physician, or a judicial officer may request a referral on behalf of a student suspected of having a disability.

All referrals must be in writing to the building administration.

Upon receipt of referral, your building administration will set up a meeting with you to discuss your concerns and offer any potential building level support. If the parent is interested in accessing the building level support they can withdraw the CSE referral and instead seek support through MTSS. If they want they can access the MTSS support and ask the referral to still move forward. At that time, the referral will be shared with the office of PPS, who will then notify the parent with a notice of the referral, a copy of the procedural safeguards, and a request for consent to conduct mandatory evaluations. Once the signed consent form is received by the Office of Pupil Services, the consent form is date-stamped, evaluations are assigned, and a meeting date is scheduled. With limited exceptions, evaluations and eligibility determinations must be completed within 60 days of receipt of parental consent to begin the evaluation process.

Student Evaluation

Initial evaluations consist of a social history and interview, an educational evaluation, a psychological evaluation, a classroom observation, and a physical examination. Other evaluations may be requested or recommended by the evaluation team, as needed. Additional evaluations may include speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, audiological, psychiatric, augmentative communication, and assistive technology. Tests and evaluations are matched to the child's needs. All evaluations are provided at no cost to the family unless the family chooses to secure private evaluations.

Each evaluator writes a report identifying the evaluation tools used, the results of the testing, and the child's strengths and needs. Many reports include an assessment of where the child stands in comparison to peers. Prior to a CSE meeting, evaluators share their findings and the results of the evaluations with the parents/guardians. This may occur in a conference, via telephone, or by sharing and discussing the report. This allows parents to ask questions before the formal CSE meeting to ensure understanding of the results. Any unresolved issues or concerns may then be addressed when the CSE convenes.

Recommendations for services are made by the Committee as a whole, upon its review and consideration of the evaluations conducted and other information shared. Parents have the right to secure their own evaluations at any time, which must be reviewed by the Committee upon request. The District retains the right to arrange its own evaluations. To avoid duplication or unreliable results, parents are encouraged to first discuss with the District any plans to secure independent evaluations.

Right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at District Expense

If a parent disagrees with the results of an evaluation conducted by the CSE, they may request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at public expense in accordance with Board policy #7680. Board policy establishes maximum rates for all IEEs and provides for a waiver where necessary. The CSE maintains a list of independent evaluators who have agreed to accept the approved rates, which can be sent to parents upon request.

Parents seeking an IEE are encouraged to first contact the Director of Pupil Services, Alexandra LaFontaine-Casabonea, to discuss concerns. If the District believes its evaluation is appropriate, or if an independently secured evaluation does not meet District criteria, the District may deny payment and offer a hearing if necessary.

Eligibility

To be identified as a student with an educational disability by the CSE, a student must meet criteria for classification in accordance with one of thirteen defined disability categories, must demonstrate an adverse impact on educational performance, and require specialized instruction and/or related services to access the District's educational program. The thirteen disability categories are listed in Appendix A.

IEP Development

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a legal document mandated by state and federal law for all students identified as having a disability. At a minimum, an IEP includes demographic information, a list of assessments and other information reviewed by the Committee, identification of the student's strengths and weaknesses, present levels of performance in academic, functional, social, and physical development, management needs, statements of special educational needs, annual goals with objective criteria to measure progress, accommodations (including testing accommodations), and transition plans and goals for students in the year they turn 15 and every year thereafter as long as eligible.

By law, students are entitled to receive specialized instruction in the least restrictive environment appropriate to meet their educational needs. Students may not be removed from regular education classrooms unless necessary to provide meaningful access to the general curriculum and to develop skills to meet identified annual goals. When behavior interferes with learning, a more restrictive placement may be considered. In such cases, the Committee first seeks consent to conduct a functional assessment and, where appropriate, develop an Individualized Behavior Plan.

The IEP is a confidential document requiring written parental consent to share outside the District, except for consultants deemed to have legitimate educational interest. More information and the NYS-mandated IEP format can be found [here](#).

Annual Review

IEPs must be reviewed annually by the CSE and made available to parents, educators, and others working with the student by the start of each school year.

Reevaluation

Once a student is found eligible for specialized instruction and receives an IEP, the Committee must arrange for a reevaluation every three years or upon formal request by a parent or teacher. Reevaluation involves reviewing existing data to determine whether additional assessments are necessary to assess the nature of the disability, the student's abilities and needs, and to develop appropriate goals. If testing is required, the Committee provides written notice and seeks parental consent.

Dispute Resolution

If parents disagree with the Committee's recommendations, they should first contact the Director of Pupil Services, Alexandra LaFontaine-Casabonea, to discuss concerns. If unresolved, parents may request mediation, file a due process complaint, or file a complaint with the State Education Department. The District aims to resolve conflicts collaboratively and build consensus whenever possible.

A copy of the Procedural Safeguards explaining parents' rights is available on the District website and attached [here](#).

Continuum of Special Education Services in Blind Brook

The Blind Brook School District provides a range of services and programs for students with disabilities, consistent with state and federal regulations. These services ensure that students can access the general curriculum and benefit from special education instruction.

Related Services

Definition: Services designed to help students with disabilities benefit from special education and access the general curriculum. These services are provided as needed to support a student's participation in the general education environment.

Service Types:

- **Physical Therapy (PT):** Supports students with gross motor or mobility needs to access school activities.
- **Occupational Therapy (OT):** Supports students with fine motor skills, sensory processing, or daily living skills to participate in school.
- **Speech and Language Services:** Supports communication skills, including articulation, language comprehension, and expressive communication.
- **Psychological Services:** Supports assessment, counseling, and interventions to address social-emotional or learning needs.
- **Parent Counseling and Training:** Provides parents with strategies, resources, and support to help their child succeed in school.
- **Behavioral Supports:** Includes behavior intervention plans, social skills training, and consultation to address challenging behaviors.

Minimum Service: Determined individually by the CSE based on student needs; no universal minimum

Grades: K-12, as deemed appropriate by the CSE

Consultant Teacher Services (CT)

Consultant Teacher Services (CT)

Definition: Services provided by a certified special education teacher either directly to a student or indirectly through consultation with general education teachers.

Service Types:

- **Direct CT Services:** The special education teacher or provider works directly with the student to provide specially designed instruction, either individually or in a small group, to help the student benefit from general education instruction.
- **Indirect CT Services:** The special education teacher works with the student's general education teacher to modify instruction and/or the learning environment to meet the needs of the student.

Direct and indirect services can be combined as appropriate, depending on the student's needs.

Minimum Service: Two hours per week

Grades: K-12, as deemed appropriate by the CSE

Resource Room

Definition: A program providing specialized, supplementary instruction in an individual or small group setting. This instruction supplements, rather than replaces, regular classroom instruction.

Minimum Service: Three hours per week

Grades: K-12, as deemed appropriate by the CSE

Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) Services

Definition: Specially designed instruction provided to students with disabilities alongside nondisabled peers in a regular education classroom, delivered collaboratively by a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Both teachers work with all students in the room, regardless of whether they are in general education or special education, and they plan lessons together, co-teach, and co-assess or grade student work.

Program Availability:

- **Elementary School:** Grades 1–5
- **Middle School:** ELA and Social Studies (Humanities), Grades 6–8, for the 2025–2026 school year

Note: Integrated Co-Teaching is **not a required part of the NYSED special education continuum** but is available as an inclusive instructional option.

Special Class

Definition: A self-contained classroom consisting of students with disabilities grouped according to similar instructional needs. Students receive their primary instruction separate from nondisabled peers.

Program Availability (2025–2026 school year):

- 8:1:2 Class K–2
- English Language Arts and Mathematics K–12
- Academic Skills (Elementary School) and Learning Center (Grades 6–12)

These descriptions are from the [NYSED Special Education Continuum Memo \(April 2008 – Updated November 2013\)](#). The rest of the memo with more information related to the provision of these services may be found at: New York State Education Department - Continuum of Special Education Services for School-Age Students with Disabilities

Appendix A: New York State Disability Categories

Regulations of the Commissioner, Part 200.1.zz.1-13

1. **Autism**

A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a student's educational performance. Characteristics often include: repetitive activities, stereotyped movements, resistance to change, and unusual sensory responses. Does not apply if primarily caused by emotional disturbance. Manifestations after age 3 may still meet criteria.

2. **Deafness**

A hearing impairment so severe that the student is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, affecting educational performance.

3. **Deaf-Blindness**

Concomitant hearing and visual impairments causing severe communication and developmental needs that cannot be accommodated in programs for only deaf or blind students.

4. **Emotional Disability**

Exhibits one or more of the following over a long period to a marked degree, affecting educational performance:

- Inability to learn not explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- Inability to maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships
- Inappropriate behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
- Pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
- Physical symptoms or fears associated with personal/school problems
Includes schizophrenia; excludes socially maladjusted unless emotionally disturbed.

5. **Hearing Impairment**

An impairment in hearing, permanent or fluctuating, affecting educational performance but not meeting the definition of deafness.

6. **Learning Disability**

A disorder in basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, affecting listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or math. Includes perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia. Excludes problems primarily due to visual, hearing, motor,

intellectual, emotional, or environmental factors.

7. Intellectual Disability

Significantly subaverage intellectual functioning with concurrent adaptive deficits, evident during the developmental period, affecting educational performance.

8. Multiple Disabilities

Concomitant impairments (e.g., intellectual disability-blindness) causing severe educational needs not accommodated by programs for a single impairment. Excludes deaf-blindness.

9. Orthopedic Impairment

Severe orthopedic impairments affecting educational performance. Includes congenital anomalies, diseases, or other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations).

10. Other Health Impairment

Limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems (e.g., asthma, diabetes, ADHD) affecting educational performance.

11. Speech or Language Impairment

Communication disorders (stuttering, articulation, language, voice) affecting educational performance.

12. Traumatic Brain Injury

Acquired brain injury from external physical force or certain medical conditions, resulting in cognitive, language, memory, attention, reasoning, sensory, motor, or psychosocial impairments affecting educational performance. Excludes congenital or birth trauma injuries.

13. Visual Impairment, including Blindness

Vision impairment, partial or total, affecting educational performance even with correction.

Appendix B: 504 Disability Determination Checklist

Based on Regulations – May 24, 2011, 29 FR Part 1630

1. Is there evidence of a Physical or Mental Impairment?

- Physical: physiological disorder, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting body systems (e.g., neurological, respiratory, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, sensory organs).
- Mental: intellectual disability, organic brain syndrome, emotional/mental illness, or specific learning disabilities.
 Yes No

2. Does the Impairment Impact a Major Life Activity?

Examples: caring for oneself, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, learning, working, thinking, communicating, interacting with others.

Major bodily functions: immune, neurological, circulatory, digestive, reproductive, endocrine, etc.

Yes No

3. Does the Impairment Substantially Limit the Student's Ability to Engage in a Major Life Activity?

- Substantially limiting: compared to most people in the general population.
- Consider duration, condition, manner of performance.
- Mitigating measures **cannot** be considered (e.g., medication, therapy, assistive technology).
Examples: deafness, blindness, autism, diabetes, cerebral palsy, bipolar disorder, PTSD, schizophrenia.
 Yes No

If "Yes," the student is protected under 504 against discrimination.