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SPECIALTY SCHOOLS/PROGRAMS OF CHOICE

The Governing Board desires to provide a variety of innovative educational programs to accommodate students' diverse learning needs and interests, foster student engagement in the schools, and enhance student achievement. Toward this end, the Board may establish and maintain specialty schools or programs of choice.

A district specialty school or program of choice may differ from the traditional educational program in its academic emphasis, sequence of curriculum, educational philosophy, instructional strategy, structure, setting, size, scheduling, targeted student population, decision-making process, and/or other components. All specialty schools or programs of choice shall offer enrolled students the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve district content standards in core academic subjects and shall provide access to the course of study required for high school graduation.

Any staff member, parent/guardian of any student, or other interested person may request the Board to establish a specialty school or program of choice. The Superintendent or designee shall establish procedures and criteria for reviewing proposals. Based on such criteria, he/she shall evaluate all proposals received and present his/her recommendation to the Board for action.

As necessary to provide flexibility to specialty schools or programs of choice to improve student performance and/or streamline operations, the Superintendent or designee may request that the Superintendent of Public Instruction waive any provision of the Education Code except provisions specified in Education Code 58509.

The Superintendent or designee shall establish processes to ensure communication among staff in the specialty schools or programs of choice and staff in the regular educational program in order to share information and ideas.

School Specialty Programs

As educators committed to fostering all-inclusive student development, we recognize the pivotal role of specialty programs in enriching the educational experience and nurturing diverse interests among our students. Westminster School District firmly believes that a well-rounded education goes beyond traditional academics to encompass a spectrum of learning opportunities that cater to individual talents, passions, and aspirations. These specialty programs serve as dynamic platforms for students to explore their unique interests, cultivate essential skills, and ultimately develop into engaged and empowered learners. As provide an inclusive and comprehensive education, it is imperative to underscore the significance of these programs in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and personal growth among our student body. In alignment with our commitment to student-centered learning, WSD will continue to support the following Specialty Programs:

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1. **Dual Language Immersion**
   Dual Language Immersion Programs in schools play a crucial role in fostering bilingualism and cultural understanding among students. By offering instruction in two languages, these programs not only facilitate academic growth but also promote cognitive development and cultural appreciation. Being bilingual opens doors to diverse opportunities in an increasingly interconnected world, enhancing career prospects and facilitating communication across borders. Moreover, it enhances empathy and understanding of different cultures, fostering a more inclusive society. Bilingual individuals often demonstrate enhanced problem-solving skills, multitasking abilities, and cognitive flexibility, which are invaluable assets in today's globalized workforce. Embracing bilingualism through Dual Language Immersion Programs not only enriches individual experiences but also strengthens communities by bridging linguistic and cultural divides.

2. **STEM**
   STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs in schools are vital for preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. These programs cultivate essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration, which are highly sought after in today's workforce. By engaging students in hands-on activities and real-world applications, STEM programs spark curiosity and passion for these fields, fostering a lifelong love for learning. Furthermore, STEM education equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle pressing global issues, from climate change to healthcare innovation. Examples of STEM programs include robotics, coding, science fairs, engineering challenges, and mathematics competitions, all of which provide opportunities for students to apply theoretical concepts to practical problems, encouraging innovation and experimentation. Ultimately, STEM programs empower students to become active contributors to society, driving progress and innovation in diverse fields.

3. **Arts Education**
   Arts programs in schools are essential for nurturing creativity, self-expression, and emotional intelligence among students. These programs provide a platform for students to explore various forms of artistic expression, such as music, visual arts, theater, and dance, allowing them to develop their unique voices and perspectives. Engaging in arts education fosters critical thinking skills, as students learn to analyze and interpret complex ideas through creative mediums. Moreover, participation in arts programs enhances students' confidence and self-esteem, as they gain a sense of accomplishment through their artistic achievements. Examples of arts programs in schools include music ensembles, art classes, drama productions, dance clubs, and poetry workshops, all of which provide opportunities for students to cultivate their talents and collaborate with peers.

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By integrating arts education into the curriculum, schools not only enrich students' academic experiences but also foster a deeper appreciation for culture and diversity, preparing them to thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

4. **GATE**
   Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs in schools are vital for meeting the unique academic needs of high-achieving students and maximizing their potential. These programs offer enriched and accelerated curriculum options that challenge students beyond the standard curriculum, allowing them to delve deeper into their areas of interest and excel academically. By providing a stimulating learning environment tailored to their abilities, GATE programs help foster intellectual growth, critical thinking skills, and creativity among gifted students. Moreover, these programs offer opportunities for students to engage in advanced projects, research, and competitions that allow them to explore their passions and develop expertise in various fields. Examples of GATE programs include honors classes, advanced placement (AP) courses, specialized seminars, mentorship programs, and enrichment activities such as math Olympiads, science fairs, and debate clubs. Through GATE programs, schools can nurture the talents of gifted students, empowering them to become future leaders, innovators, and contributors to society.

5. **College and Careers**
   College and Careers programs in schools are crucial for preparing students for success beyond graduation by equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to make informed decisions about their future academic and professional pathways. These programs provide students with guidance and support throughout the college application process, including assistance with standardized testing, college research, and financial aid applications, ensuring equitable access to higher education opportunities. Additionally, College and Careers programs offer career exploration activities such as internships, job shadowing, and guest speakers, allowing students to gain insight into various industries and professions. Through career readiness workshops and resume-building sessions, students learn essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and professionalism, which are invaluable in today's competitive job market. Examples of College and Careers programs include college counseling services, career development workshops, college fairs, mock interviews, and industry-specific academies. By investing in College and Careers programs, schools empower students to pursue their aspirations and achieve their full potential, ultimately fostering a skilled and educated workforce ready to contribute to the global economy.

6. **Virtual Learning program**
   Virtual learning programs in schools are essential for providing flexible and accessible education opportunities that meet the diverse needs of students. Particularly when parents/students are confronted with obstacles like transitioning between housing or

dealing with medical conditions. Virtual learning has become an indispensable tool for ensuring continuity of education and reaching students regardless of geographical barriers or physical limitations. Virtual learning also promotes digital literacy and technological proficiency, skills that are increasingly essential in today's digital age. By embracing virtual learning, our District can enhance educational equity by providing access to quality education for all students, regardless of their circumstances, while also preparing them for success in an increasingly digital world.

7. **Innovative Instructional Programs**
   Innovative instructional programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and Project-Based Learning (PBL) play a crucial role in modern education by offering diverse approaches to engage students, enhance critical thinking skills, and promote deeper learning. AVID provides students with academic and organizational skills to succeed in rigorous coursework, fostering a college-bound mindset and equipping them with tools for lifelong learning. Universal Design for Learning ensures that instructional materials and methods are accessible and effective for all students, regardless of their learning styles or abilities, thus promoting inclusivity and equity in education. Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning empower students to tackle real-world challenges, applying their knowledge and skills to solve complex problems and create meaningful projects. These innovative instructional programs not only cultivate academic excellence but also foster creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking, preparing students to thrive in an ever-evolving global society.

8. **Community Service/Engagement Programs**
   Community service/engagement programs such as service learning are integral components of education that promote civic engagement, empathy, and social responsibility among students. Service learning provides opportunities for students to apply academic knowledge and skills to address real-world issues within their communities, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment. By participating in community service/engagement projects, students develop a deeper understanding of societal challenges and the importance of contributing positively to their communities. Examples of community service/engagement projects include volunteering at local shelters, organizing food drives for the homeless, participating in environmental clean-up efforts, or tutoring younger students. Through these experiences, students not only make tangible contributions to society but also gain valuable interpersonal and leadership skills, cultivate empathy, and develop a lifelong commitment to social justice and community service. Community service/engagement programs not only enhance academic learning but also foster ethical and compassionate citizens who are actively engaged in making a positive difference in the world.

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Program Evaluation

The Superintendent or designee shall conduct an annual evaluation of each specialty school or program of choice which includes testing of basic skills for student participants and which identifies the variables that may have affected student academic achievement. The evaluation process shall include input from teachers, parents/guardians, and students from the specialty school or program of choice. (Education Code 58510)

Evaluation reports shall be sent to the Superintendent of Public Instruction on or before August 1 following the close of the school year. (Education Code 58510)

Prior to submitting the evaluation report to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Superintendent or designee shall report the evaluation results to the Board. The Board shall review the effectiveness of the school or program in meeting program objectives, compare student achievement data with that of students in other district schools, evaluate changes in the school or program over time, and make program modifications as needed.

Legal Reference:

State	**Description**
5 CCR 1068-1074	Alternative schools accountability model; assessments
5 CCR 11705	Charter schools as alternative schools
Ed. Code 35160.5	District policies; rules and regulations
Ed. Code 48980	Parent/Guardian notifications
Ed. Code 52052	Accountability; numerically significant student subgroups
Ed. Code 58500-58512	Alternative schools and programs of choice
Management Resources	**Description**
Court Decision	American Civil Rights Foundation v. Los Angeles Unified School District (2008) 169 Cal.App.4th 436
U.S. Department of Education Publication	Creating and Sustaining Successful K-8 Magnet Schools, September 2008
U.S. Department of Education Publication	Innovations in Education: Successful Magnet High Schools, September 2008
Website	CSBA District and County Office of Education Legal Services
Website	U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement
Website	California Department of Education, Alternative Schools of Choice
Website	Foundation for California Community Colleges, Early College High School Initiative

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WESTMINSTER SCHOOL DISTRICT
Westminster, California

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