

Special Services in Westside Community Schools

Section 504 Services

In accordance with federal rules, Westside must identify, evaluate, and provide Section 504 services to students who, because of a documented disability impacting a major life function, require help to access appropriate educational services. Teams of staff members, often including the parent(s), collaborate to determine student eligibility and to make decisions in this process.

English Language Learning (ELL) Services

Westside's ELL staff focuses on improving the education of limited English proficient (LEP) students by assisting them to learn English and meet state and local academic standards. Westside has approximately eight certified ELL teachers, and one district-level program coordinator. These staff members are responsible for providing services to students within all K-12 buildings. Although this number fluctuates greatly from year to year, we have about 150 students (speaking 30 languages) receiving ELL services in the 2015-16 school year.

Excellence in Youth (EY) Services

Westside's Excellence in Youth (EY) Program was developed to provide expanded learning opportunities for high-ability students and to encourage the talent development of all students. EY opportunities occur in four areas: within the classroom, within the school building, district-wide, and at home. EY students are identified for the program, starting in 3rd grade, through specific eligibility criteria. Once identified, students receive services based on their need. In addition, all 3rd – 6th grade students are provided enrichment experiences during E/I time. This time is designed to expose them to a range of topics not normally covered in the regular curriculum. At every level, the selected opportunities, workshops, and seminars focus on enhancing curriculum and challenging students to not only show above average ability, but also to focus on creativity and task commitment. As the program continues to evolve into K-12 services, the more formal emphasis is on students in grades three through eight. As students advance in high school, their abilities are challenged through a wide variety of course selections. These opportunities include Advanced Placement courses and college courses.

Guidance Counseling Services

School Counseling services are proactive and preventative, helping to promote a healthy and collaborative school culture. As an integral part of the total school program, students in every building across the District are able to access school counseling services for the purpose of developing life and problem-solving skills, focusing on career preparation and academic planning, as well as to discuss personal and social issues. While each building provides these student services in a unique way, it is the goal of all school counselors to implement a comprehensive school counseling program, as defined by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA). Components of a comprehensive program include classroom group guidance, small group and individual counseling, and collaborating with parents, teachers, and community resources.

School Social Work Services

District 66 employs three school social workers that collaborate to provide services and develop relationships with students, families, schools, and the entire Westside community. School social workers help enhance communication between schools and homes, identify needs or obstacles affecting a student's school performance, build on existing strengths within the family, locate formal and informal supports to assist families in need, and support families in crisis. Social workers' school partnerships allow them to establish mentoring relationships with students, attend 504, MDT, and IEP meetings for students with disabilities, and provide in-home, carry-over support for the implementation of behavioral strategies. The school social workers also have a unique and beneficial connection to the Westside community, which allows them to operate a District food pantry, facilitate communication between school and medical, mental health, and social services providers, and provide access for families to community services.

Special Education Services

The mission of the Special Education Department is to provide the very best possible educational opportunities to students with disabilities ranging in age from birth through age 21. In order to fulfill that mission, the goal is to educate all students in their neighborhood school to the greatest extent possible, regardless of their disabilities. This is made possible by offering a continuum of services designed to meet individual student needs. These services range from a consultative model to a highly specialized alternate program. Westside currently has about 1,000 special education-identified students and approximately 100 certified staff members. The staff includes special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, assistive technology and vision specialists, a deaf educator, and school psychologists, all of whom use their training and expertise to provide support to students and staff at the building level. These individuals receive ongoing training and professional development opportunities, as well as designated time to collaborate with their general and special education colleagues, all for the purpose of improving learning for students with disabilities.