

Columbia Union Conference
GUIDELINES FOR SERVICING THE ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGED

Teach to the child who needs it the most, then you will meet the needs of all the students.

L. Kibble

I. Philosophy For The Inclusion Of The Academically Challenged

We have an inherent responsibility to provide for the education of all our students and cannot, and should not, contract out this critical responsibility as we work toward the development of the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual ideal. This inclusive aspect of our educational system is a God-given responsibility which may have been neglected in the past for financial and other reasons. With the increasing number of academically challenged students in our churches and schools, there is a need to develop new paradigms to address and provide for the needs of all students in our schools. This must be accomplished in a partnership of the home, church and school.

The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education, derived from the Bible and the inspired writings of Ellen G. White, point to the redemptive aim of true education: to restore human beings into the image of their Maker. Adventist education seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator; to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others' thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individuals' potential; and to embrace all that is true, good and beautiful. An education of this kind imparts far more than academic knowledge.

II. Administration

It should be clearly understood that academically challenged students are not mentally retarded. In fact, academically challenged students are usually highly intelligent, and simply require specific accommodations that open the doors to academic success.

It is essential that the administrator create an environment that will maximize student learning and facilitate the inclusion of the academically challenged. This environment must also allow the teaching staff to feel supported in their efforts to accommodate all learning styles. The administrator is key in facilitating communication between faculty, students, and parents. The administrator must remain involved and supportive with all entities throughout the process. Learning specialists are an important part of this team effort when available.

A. It is recommended that Columbia Union Conference schools set up a screening process for all incoming students in grades 3-12 in the first month of school, with an educational screening tool from the following recommended list:

1. **NEAT** - Norris Educational Achievement Test - 30 minute timed test
(Kit 150 for manual and 25 student booklets for \$50,)
2. **WRAT** - **Wide** Range Achievement Test - 30 minute timed test
(Manual - 25 test booklets for \$38 - order either blue or tan form)

The purpose of the initial screening is to identify the strengths and needs for each student, not for the purpose of exclusion. All testing beyond the ITBS, and ITED annual testing program (and state proficiency testing programs where required) must have written parental permission which is kept in the student permanent record folder. (See attached sample permission form.)

IMPORTANT NOTE: As students are identified with academic challenges, the importance of having consultations with the student, the parents and teachers together can not be over emphasized. This three-way effort forms a team that will keep communication lines open and provide continuing support.

B. It is further recommended that current students who are struggling academically, as identified by the teachers or parents, also be screened during the first month to identify particular strengths and needs.

1. Students who score significantly below grade-level requirements on the initial screening should be referred to a licensed school psychologist for further academic evaluation through the public school district where the student resides, or through a private licensed school psychologist. This further testing must be parent initiated.

2. Students who show mild to moderate academic challenges may benefit from accommodations in particular areas such as, but not limited to:

Tests

Extended time
Reading of tests
Oral vs. written answers
Open note/book tests
Retaking

Assignments

Modification of assignments
Extended time
Make-up assignments
Electronic aids
Tutoring
Interactive activities
Curriculum Integration
Cooperative learning strategies

Environment

Seating arrangements
Groupings
Free of unnecessary distractions
White noise
Uninterrupted study

Organizational/study skills

Assignment books
Study skills class
Organizational check sheet
Supervised study areas/periods
Contracts

III. Individual Education Plans

The writing of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student who qualifies, provides access to critical accommodations that assist the student to succeed academically. Additionally, the IEP provides access to governmental and university level accommodations that help the student succeed at the higher educational levels. The abuse of an IEP can rob the student of these benefits and handicap the student's academic progress.

An IEP is written by a certified school psychologist, after administering an educational evaluation to a student who has been identified as having a learning difficulty. The evaluation includes interviews with the student, teachers and parents as well as formal academic testing. The IEP provides an overview of the student's strengths and needs as well as learning style, and recommends accommodations for both the student and classroom teachers to help facilitate learning. The IEP is a legal document that schools are responsible for implementing.

A. IEP Implementation

The IEP will include:

the results of the academic and psychological evaluation
the current level of performance
academic goals and objectives
classroom modifications

The classroom teacher will be provided with a copy of classroom accommodations and is responsible for their implementation. If a school accepts a student with an IEP, then it is under legal obligation to implement the accommodations. Failure to implement an IEP could constitute a dereliction of a teacher's/school's legal responsibility. Creating such jeopardy may constitute grounds for termination of service.

Teachers should not be expected to implement IEPs without a consultation meeting with the school psychologist, administration, student and parents to determine each participant's part in the implementation of the accommodations. It is in the teachers' best interest to participate in this consultation process. During this meeting, IEP accommodations are discussed and can be modified. Once accommodations are agreed upon, all parties (parents, school representative, and school psychologist) sign the IEP and it becomes a legally enforceable document. Without the parent/legal guardian, the consultation cannot take place.

Once an IEP is written, it is not re-written again for three years. However, there should be a yearly meeting with all parties meeting to note progress as well as discuss current changes in classes, teachers, schedules, etc.

B. Classroom Accommodations

Accommodations will vary for each student and their individual classes. The teacher will need to be acquainted with and use a variety of teaching strategies that can meet many different learning styles and needs. Sensitivity to individual needs and a willingness to find solutions will equip the teacher to achieve success.

C. In-service Needs

Training and in-servicing of all the entities involved is a vital part of working with academically challenged students. School administrators and conference office personnel must take responsibility for planning ways to provide this needed information. Teachers are busy and ways must be explored to assist and equip teachers with the resources to facilitate success.

The following are recommended in-service topics:

Administration

- Awareness of issues with academically challenged students
- Administration and interpretation of screening instruments
- IEP awareness
- Legalities/responsibilities
- Creation of a cohesive team
- Support and follow-through of staff efforts
- Collaboration with teachers/parents
- Supervision and follow-through of the academically challenged student

Presentation to staff and boards
Awareness of available state and federal funding for special programs

Teachers

- Awareness of issues with academically challenged students
- Administration and interpretation of screening instruments
- IEP awareness
- Legalities/responsibilities
- Teaching strategies for accommodating academically challenged students
- Integration of curriculum
- Practical classroom accommodations
- Classroom management with IEPs students
- Collaboration with parents

Parents

- Awareness of issues with academically challenged students
- Parental rights/responsibilities
- Coping skills for parenting the academically challenged student
- Collaboration with school/teachers
- Building a relationship with the school

Students

- Understanding rights and accommodations
- Understanding responsibility and cooperation
- Organizational/study skills
- Test taking skills
- Faculty contact/advisor

School Board

Awareness of issues with academically challenged issues
Legal responsibilities
Possible financial implications
Affirmation and support of staff
Positive impact of servicing academically challenged students

Closing Thoughts:

This *Columbia Union Guidelines for Servicing Academically Challenged Students* is just the beginning of a process that focuses on the learning of all students. This process of inclusion not only strengthens our whole educational system but also produces a more effective teacher for all students. It calls for a commitment to our students and will only be realized by the cooperation of all entities within the system. It grows out of our moral commitment to develop the full potential of our students. Ultimately, we wish all students to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. This focuses on the belief that the purpose of education and the work of redemption are the same.

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Student _____ **Date:** _____

Age _____ **Birthday** _____ **Grade** _____

Test(s) to be administered:

Examiner

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Reason for Testing:

_____ I agree to testing

_____ I do not agree to testing

_____ I need more information

Parent Signature

Date