

Westlake Middle School:

Inclusion Policy

Disclaimer: This WMS Inclusion Policy does not supercede any Mount Pleasant Board of Education Policy (see #7610) or Federal and New York State special education laws that may either directly or indirectly connect to these contents.

Westlake Middle School's (WMS) Inclusion Policy is discussed and communicated to students and parents to ensure full understanding of inclusion expectations during each school year. Effective during the school year 2017-18, an abbreviated version of the Inclusion Policy is published in the student handbook. The full version of the policy is available on the school's website: <http://wms.mtplcsd.org>.

Mission Statement

At WMS, we are committed to engage and develop independent, inquisitive, tenacious, and open-minded students who think critically, perform innovatively and act ethically in our local and global community.

Philosophy

The staff, students and community of WMS are committed to academic excellence through a program which recognizes the uniqueness of the changing adolescent and fosters the development of self-esteem, caring and respect in all our students within the local and global community. We seek to develop each student's full potential through a challenging, authentic curriculum and a commitment to intellectual development through inquiry. We will provide a foundation for lifelong learning by fostering creativity and developing critical thinking. Our students will be prepared to become ethical and responsible members of society.

Our Goals

At WMS, we are committed to educating our students in the least restrictive environment. We support collaborative and inclusive educational practices that enable students to develop into open-minded, global citizens. WMS is committed to engage and develop independent, inquisitive students who think critically. We also seek to foster the development of self-esteem, caring, and respect for all students within the local and global community.

Differentiation

WMS teachers differentiate instruction because we understand that all students learn differently. We strive to provide an experience in the classroom that will be effective for all types of learners. Differentiation within the classroom serves to actively engage students in learning, and allows them to access curriculum in a way that supports their particular learning needs. Examples include:

- scaffolds/supports
- visual material
- chunking of information

- use of technology
- multiple entry points

Special education teachers provide specially designed instruction in order to meet the learning needs of their students, so they can access the general education curriculum. Specially-designed instruction means “adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child...the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.”¹

Every teacher supports and provides differentiated instruction to all students, including those with disabilities. Rigorous and relevant learning environments are created to maintain a positive school-wide climate. Students with disabilities are held to high expectations and are given the appropriate supports and services to meet those expectations. Our goal at WMS is to encourage students to utilize the skills and strategies taught in order to become independent learners and ultimately, successful in their adult life.

The Four Principles of Good Practice²:

1. Affirming Identity & Self-Esteem

WMS is an inclusive environment for all students and a safe place to develop an identity through personal explorations in the academic and social arenas. Acceptance of difference and tolerance of diversity is integrated into our school’s environment. Expectations for students’ academic and social development are challenging, but also realistic and developmentally appropriate. WMS has an extensive support staff, which includes a social worker, a reading specialist, special education teachers, a school psychologist, a guidance department, an English as a New Language (ENL) specialist, a speech/language teacher, a school nurse, a behavioral consultant and a physical therapy and occupational therapy consultant. These members of our team, in association with administration, faculty, students and parents, support the social and emotional well-being of our school community by employing their knowledge and expertise when required and when necessary.

Each month throughout the school year, all students participate in an advisory period with a teacher/mentor. These regular sessions are designed to support our students’ emotional growth and development, often by focusing on issues of identity, self-esteem, tolerance and difference. Advisory draws upon many areas of expertise and involves all of our faculty, our guidance department, social worker and administration. The IB Learner Profile model is also used and integrated into classes and the Community Leaders Project (CLP), giving students insight into their growth and development and their potential leadership skills.

¹ Regulations of the Commissioner of Education-Parts 200 and 201, (2016, 2010) (Education Law 34 C.F.R. § 300.38 (b) (3); 8 NYCRR § 200.1(vv).

² Learning Diversity and Inclusion in IB Programmes (2016).

2. Valuing Prior Knowledge:

Prior Knowledge of Students (personal)

At WMS, we recognize that students come to the middle school with different, complex and diverse backgrounds and experiences. We acknowledge that these backgrounds strengthen our community and provide opportunities for learning and developing open-mindedness. Prior to entering the middle school, students from the elementary school visit our buildings and are mentored by 6th grade students. Members of the special education department liaise together and communicate about students' needs, accommodations and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 Plans (504s), at all levels of our students' development. The guidance department liaises with the elementary schools to learn the necessary prior knowledge about all students entering the middle school. They also pass on knowledge about middle school students to the high school guidance department when they begin 9th grade.

Prior Knowledge of Students (Academic)

To build upon prior knowledge at the middle school level, students are supported in their growth and development through a curriculum that is vertically and horizontally aligned. All curricula follow the New York State Common Core Standards which are designed to scaffold learning for students from year to year and to prepare them for college entry upon graduation from high school. State testing data and additional student growth data gathered from a variety of means, (e.g., classroom work, portfolios, tests/quizzes, writing samples), enable teachers to create a personal portrait of students' knowledge and development across the grades through their middle school experience. This information is used by teachers for future planning and instruction.

3. Scaffolding

The faculty at WMS work collaboratively for a holistic approach to students' learning experiences. Grade level teachers work in teams and meet weekly to discuss student progress and needs in the classroom.

Examples of scaffolding techniques used in the classroom at WMS are:

- previewing vocabulary
- using graphic organizers
- providing choice for projects
- prompting through questioning
- visuals/modeling
- chunking tasks
- guided notes
- leveling of assignments
- simplifying directions
- workshop model
- structured collaboration and group work

In addition to academic meetings, guidance counselors meet regularly with faculty to review academic progress and its links to students' social and emotional well-being. Ultimately, our goal is for students to become independent learners, but we also recognize that children face challenges that need to be supported. Eligible students with disabilities have an IEP or 504 Plan which is developed based upon their levels of performance and needs. The Committee on Special Education (CSE), considers student learning needs and determines programs and accommodations based upon student need in the least restrictive environment. Student need drives goal development which leads to accommodations and programs, as articulated in a student's IEP. The Section 504 Team determines services and/or accommodations/modifications to meet the individual needs of the student. Superintendent's Conference Days and Teaching Institutes are often dedicated to student learning and teacher professional development in this area.

4. Extending Learning

Teaching and learning at WMS is based upon the MYP framework and allows all students to participate in an inquiry-based, concept-driven curriculum. All teachers use technology in the classroom which may be in the form of Internet-based research, databases, apps for specific educational subjects and content. Approaches to Learning (ATL) skills are implemented at all grade levels and subject areas, giving students the capacity to develop their full potential in all their academic subject areas.

Students are encouraged to use all their ATL knowledge to directly connect to real-world challenges, solve problems and engage in issues. This approach to learning helps to further their academic abilities and leads to success in school. Students are expected to extend their learning from school into their lives. Students with disabilities are supported as appropriate by scaffolding their learning to enable them to fully participate in real-world tasks alongside their peers, and modifications and accommodations are provided to students as needed. WMS has reading specialists, speech/language teachers and an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher who enable students who have limited reading, writing or speaking abilities to integrate into the regular education environment.

Definition of Need for Special Education Services

The Mount Pleasant Central School District, including WMS, defines students with a disability as a student with a disability as defined in section 4401(1) of the New York State Education Law, who has not attained the age of 21 prior to September 1st and who is entitled to attend public schools pursuant to section 3202 of the New York State Education Law and who, because of mental, physical or emotional reasons, has been identified as having a disability and who requires special services and programs approved by the New York State Education Department. Students with a disability who do not meet the criteria for classification under this definition may be entitled to services and/or accommodations/modifications under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In addition, WMS and the Mount Pleasant Central School District's policies on special education are in compliance with federal and State laws.

Special Education Needs (SEN)

Our SEN practices of including all students within the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate with peers, promotes an understanding of differences, individual learning styles and unique strengths. In educating students with disabilities, we understand and value the unique way individuals learn and utilize multiple experiences and learning opportunities to heighten their understanding of the world around them. WMS is committed to ensuring that all children deserve an equal opportunity to be successful in the classroom. The school recognizes the existence of individual differences in the intellectual, social, emotional and physical development of children. To this end, students are provided with the needed resources to become innovative, critical, independent and reflective thinkers. Differentiated learning approaches and materials are utilized to meet the unique needs and learning styles of students with disabilities.

Identification Process and Services for Special Education Students

Special education is provided for students who have been identified by the Committee on Special Education (CSE). The CSE ensures the timely evaluation and program recommendations for students. The mandated members of the CSE include:

- the parents or guardians
- one general education teacher
- one special education teacher
- school psychologist
- the chairperson, designated by the school district who is qualified to provide or supervise special education, knowledgeable about the general educational curriculum and knowledgeable about the availability of district resources

Non-mandated members of the CSE may include:

- outside professional, as requested by the parent (non mandated member)
- additional parent member/parent advocate (non mandated member)
- other persons having knowledge of the student, such as related service personnel
- the student, when appropriate
- guidance counselor

To determine eligibility for educational disability/classification, the CSE reviews evaluation data, which includes current skill levels (strengths and skill delays) and the impact of a disability upon participation in general education curriculum. In accordance with special education law, the following areas are recognized when classifying students with a disability:

Learning Disability	Speech/Language Impairment	Other Health Impairment	Deaf-Blindness
Hearing Impairment/Deafness	Visual Impairment/Blind	Emotional Disturbance	Autism
Intellectual Disability	Orthopedic Impairment	Traumatic Brain Injury	Multiple Disabilities

Continuum of Services

The continuum of special education services as determined by federal and state regulations for school-age students with disabilities refers to an array of services designed to meet an individual student's needs, which may include:

- Consultant teacher services (direct and/or indirect)
- Resource room services
- Related services including speech and language services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social work and/or counseling
- Integrated co-teaching services (not a mandated service on the continuum)
- Special classes
- Out-of-District program

Additional services, as aligned with the recommendation by the CSE may include:

- transition planning to begin the school year in which the student turns 15
- twelve month special service and/or program (based on regression data and as deemed eligible by the CSE)
- special transportation
- assistive technology

Confidentiality & Management of Student Information

Educational student records are maintained in the office of Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Relevant staff have access to student IEPs & 504 Plans as needed through our student information system.

Review

During the school year, special education teachers and faculty members engage in CSE meetings, in which parents are included. Students' IEPs are reviewed annually based upon the goals that were set for students in the prior year. Individual student's needs may also be discussed during the weekly faculty special education meetings. Additionally, Section 504 plans are reviewed at least on a biennial basis.

Special Education Needs (SEN) at WMS

At WMS, many of our students with disabilities need continued support in the areas of inferential thinking, planning and organizing, navigating social situations and study skills. WMS supports students in the area of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and their problem solving abilities. Students are encouraged to increase their awareness of the world around them as well as develop insights about their own strengths and weaknesses. All students with special education needs at WMS receive appropriate, and where identified, specially designed instruction within general education classrooms, and are exposed to the same curriculum as their general education peers. We have supports in place for transitioning our students from building to building. We prepare them for the changes and challenges they face. This may encompass academic rigor, organizational skills, and the need for increased independence and responsibility. Teachers work with parents as partners and appropriate help and support is given to our students throughout their middle school experience.

Collaborative Planning

All teachers at WMS are involved and committed to collaborative planning. This planning includes regular education teachers and special education teachers who work together in “collab” classes. Collaborative MYP unit planning takes place on a regular basis throughout the school year. These planning sessions are reviewed annually by the school’s administrative staff and IB Coordinator. Any adjustments for vertical or horizontal planning are made as necessary. During these collaborative sessions, special education teachers contribute their expertise to differentiation of the MYP unit plans. Teachers who do not work directly in collab classes, follow students’ IEP’s, but can also seek additional guidance and advice regarding the special education needs of their students from case managers. WMS teachers are trained in differentiating instruction to include and challenge all learners to reach their full potential. In addition, the core academic teachers submit weekly reports to the special education teachers regarding the progress special education students are making in their classes. These reports assist the special education teachers in modifying or reinforcing concepts. Special education faculty meet on a regular basis throughout the school year ensuring smooth transitions for students moving from grade to grade.

Staff Professional Development

To assist teachers in meeting the learning needs of students, faculty participate in IB training, professional development opportunities through the local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), in-house staff development and planned development opportunities via our Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Teachers may also pursue additional classes as professional development and these may be offered by a university or teacher center in the local area. Teachers in various subject areas have training and experience in pedagogy and teaching models such as Understanding by Design (UBD) curriculum mapping, essential questions, differentiation, Socratic seminars, the reading/writing workshop model and document-based questions (DBQ).

Response to Intervention (RTI)

WMS actively engages in, and implements an RTI program. RTI is the practice of providing high-quality instruction and intervention matched to student needs. RTI is an educational strategy to close achievement gaps for students. RTI begins with high quality, research-based instruction in the general education setting provided by the general education teacher. Instruction is matched to student need through the provision of differentiated instruction in the core curriculum and supplemental intervention delivered in a multi-tier format with increasing levels of intensity and targeted focus of instruction, using a problem-solving approach. As a consequence of school-wide screenings of all students and progress monitoring, students who have not mastered critical skills or who are not making satisfactory progress can be identified for supplemental intervention. If the student continues not to make sufficient progress after receiving the most intensive level of instructional intervention, it may be determined that a referral for a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for special education is needed.

Pupil Support Team (PST)

This team is comprised of the middle school administration, guidance department, social worker, school psychologist, school nurse and special education teachers. This team is responsible for regularly reviewing all students who need support either in academic or social-emotional areas.

Inclusion Roles:

Pupil Personnel & Student Services (PPS) Department

The Mount Pleasant Central School District has a PPS department. This department consists of a Director of Pupil Personnel and Student Services and an Elementary and Secondary Supervisor of Special Education. Together, along with building administration, they supervise WMS special education teachers, the school psychologist, the school counselors, the school social worker, the speech/language teacher, the school nurse and the behavioral, occupational and physical therapy consultants.

Director of Pupil Personnel and Student Services

The PPS Director is responsible, along with the building administration, for the supervision and evaluation of all K-12 special education programs. The Director has knowledge of program assessment and development, knowledge of the CSE and the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) process and a commitment to placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent appropriate. The Director promotes students' ability to become independent thinkers and learners who will function within real-world experiences upon graduation from Mt. Pleasant Central School District.

Supervisor of Special Education (Secondary)

The Secondary Supervisor of Special Education is responsible for the supervision, observation and evaluation of special education teachers. This includes professional development of special education teachers, including best instructional practices, managing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and oversight of case managers. The Secondary Supervisor works with building administration and staff to review data and student performance to inform teacher instruction, as well as with support staff to support the social/emotional aspects of student development. The Secondary Supervisor has knowledge of students, which better informs them when chairing CSE meetings.

School Counselors

The mission of the Guidance Program is to address the academic, career, and personal/social development of students. This is accomplished through transitional programs, articulation and collaboration horizontally and vertically with staff members in the various schools throughout the Mount Pleasant Central School District. The school counselors work both individually and within groups to develop and foster the growth of the IB learner profile attributes in the student body. Their roles align with the IB Learner profile by fostering the development of empathy and caring qualities within the students. Furthermore, students are challenged to become more open-minded, respectful and reflective toward their peers, who may come from diverse religious, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. School counselors are responsible for advocating for

students and parents by helping them to find a balance in their lives, as it pertains to managing their academic, personal and social development. In terms of accessing the curriculum, the school counselors support the teachers so that the students can become inquirers, thinkers, and knowledgeable and feel safe enough to be risk-takers and to also develop reflective practices that assist them in their growth and development.

School Nurse

At WMS, the health of our faculty, staff and students is paramount. To this end, we have a full-time school nurse whose role and responsibility is to obtain and maintain health records of all students. The nurse screens all students for age-appropriate health concerns and monitors and guides those students with chronic medical issues. The school nurse is prepared and equipped to handle medical emergencies that may arise with the students or staff at WMS. An important role of the nurse is to teach prevention and care of disease and to assess illness and injury and to assist with the development of a health plan, where appropriate.

School Social Worker

The school social worker's role and responsibility is to provide social and emotional support to the school community through individual and group counseling opportunities. Through assessment, students' social and emotional needs are identified. The school social worker provides direct instruction in order to develop coping skills, problem-solving skills, social thinking skills, positive interpersonal relationships and improve self-esteem. Additionally, the school social worker provides education and consultation to parents and faculty and provides support and guidance to parents seeking outside therapy referrals and various other supports in the community. The school social worker maintains communication with outside providers and is a member of a multi-disciplinary crisis intervention team. The social worker manages crisis situations, conducts risk-assessments and develops intervention plans in order to maintain student safety. The social worker acts as liaison and provides support to students and families in crisis while they are receiving support from programs, hospitals and agencies outside Mount Pleasant Central School District. The school social worker creates and implements behavior intervention plans in order to increase adaptive functioning within the classroom and general school environment and directly collaborates with the school psychologist, guidance department and administration. The school social worker also provides consultation with outside therapists and case managers and attends intake appointments at various agencies. The school social worker provides parents with education and relevant resources and assists them with strategies and techniques in order to improve a parent's ability to support their child's particular social/emotional needs. The school social worker also assists in the development and implementation of home behavior plans in order to increase the presence of adaptive behaviors in the home, extending the home school connection.

School Psychologist

The school psychologist conducts individualized assessments of students for the CSE. Areas measured include intellectual development, adaptive behavior, memory, attention

and executive functioning and social/emotional functioning. Assessment results are used to better understand the needs of the struggling learner and determine CSE or Section 504 eligibility. Additionally, to ensure the success of all students at WMS, the following individual and group counseling services are provided for all students:

- Coping strategies
- Problem-solving
- Social thinking
- Self-esteem
- Supports for executive functioning

The school psychologist works in consultation with teachers, parents and outside providers to offer relevant services in order to support the development of emotional, prosocial and pro-academic health. The psychologist works closely with administration, students, parents, faculty, the social worker and the school counselors.

Speech/Language Teacher

The role and responsibility of the speech/language teacher is to assist students to work on developing and improving all facets of communicative functioning in order to be able to communicate both academically and socially. These areas include:

- Word-finding issues, either as a result of a specific language problem such as a language delay.
- Social communication difficulties involving how people communicate ideas with others (pragmatics).
- Structural language impairments, including difficulties creating sentences that are grammatical (syntax) and meaningful (semantics).
- Literacy impairments (reading and writing) related to the letter-to-sound relationship (phonics), the word-to-meaning relationship (semantics), and understanding the ideas presented in a text (reading comprehension).
- Voice difficulties, such as a raspy voice, a voice that is too soft, or other voice difficulties that negatively impact a person's social or academic performance.
- Cognitive impairments (e.g., attention, memory, executive function) to the extent that they interfere with communication.

The speech/language teacher assesses students' communication skills, evaluates the results of comprehensive assessments, participates in CSE meetings, provides services in accordance with IEPs, participates in 504 Teams, documents outcomes, collaborates with teachers and other professionals, consults regarding teaching practices and participates in school-wide curriculum and literacy teams.

English as a New Language (ENL) Teacher

At WMS, we understand that students are growing and living in a multilingual world. Our school embraces the range of native languages within our community and gives support to all students who are not proficient in the language of instruction, which is English. If a family has identified a language other than English as their native language and the student is not proficient in reading, writing, listening and speaking in the English language, the student is identified as an English Language Learner (ELL) and is given

ENL services required to assist the student to reach their required English language proficiency goals. The goal of ENL instruction is to ensure success for students in English instruction within the regular education setting, while supporting their knowledge and understanding of their native language and being sensitive to the challenges a newcomer may face when entering a culture that is different from their own.

Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers are responsible for providing instruction and removing barriers to learning with an understanding of students' learning styles and needs. They use data (testing evaluation as well as informal and formal assessments) to inform and differentiate their instruction to meet students' learning needs and promote their ability to access the curriculum similar to their general education counterparts. Special education teachers are required to monitor growth and document progress as it relates to student goals. Further, they are members of the CSE, which develops students' IEPs. As case managers, they facilitate communication with parents, school staff, and related service providers to ensure that students' IEPs are implemented. Finally, special education teachers are responsible to administer, score, and interpret standardized educational testing.

Behavioral Analyst

Mount Pleasant Central School District employs a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst who is an independent contractor with the school district. This specialist provides Behavior Intervention Services (BIS) both at the school and at home for classified students, as part of their IEP. They offer behavioral support to teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school team members based upon CSE recommendations. BIS is also provided at home in the form of parent training. In addition, this specialist conducts Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and develops Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).

Inclusion Policy Summary

WMS is committed to educating all students in the least restrictive environment as outlined in the District's Special Education Plan. We support collaborative and inclusive educational practices that align to federal and state regulations, as well as IB expectations. The goal is to develop students who are open-minded, independent, inquisitive who demonstrate respect within the local and global community, as articulated in the WMS Mission Statement. For additional information see the WMS IB Middle Years page.

History of Policy Development

In 2014-15, committees formed at WMS to develop the IB policies. The committees consisted of administration, teachers and parents, who met to establish the outline of the policies. During 2016-17, the policies were further refined by the IB Consultant, IB Coordinator, IB Steering Committee, by the teachers at a full faculty meeting and lastly, by administration. The policies are annually reviewed and updated by the IB Steering Committee.