



# Special Educational Needs Policy

June 2014

## **Inclusion**

At Charter Oak International Academy (COIA) we strive to continuously provide differentiated opportunities for all learners, which optimize their access to and engagement in rigorous classroom instruction.

In recognizing the unique and diverse learning needs of our students, we utilize individual strengths to bolster areas of weakness. Through creating trusting and open classroom learning environments between teachers and peers, all students live the learner profiles, develop approaches to learning, demonstrate attitudes, and identify key concepts in a collaborative setting. Our goal is for students with diverse learning needs to have the same experiences and opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Through ongoing collaboration and reflection with regular education and special area teachers, we evaluate whether all of our students are afforded the same inclusive learning experiences to express themselves academically, socially, and emotionally. We accomplish this by providing instructional support to mandated and non-mandated students, accommodations, and modifications to meet diverse learning needs in the classroom and on assessments.

## **Differentiation**

Within all instructional settings, we strive to collaborate across all disciplines to assess student needs, set appropriate goals, and maximize learning opportunities offered. Support staff and teachers work together to understand the learning needs of the child and create a profile of strengths and weaknesses. By identifying individual needs, teaching strategies and tools can be matched with different teaching approaches so all students can reach common goals. This includes using assistive technology tools and specialized software such as Clicker 6, word prediction, text to speech, speech to text, iPads, word processors, spelling aides, and online interactive instructional supports. In regards to curriculum, we focus on maintaining rigor and accessibility of grade level content by modifying assignments, projects, daily work, homework and evaluations so that all students are given opportunities to achieve to their potential.

At COIA, we follow a district Student Success Team (SST) process that looks to identify individual student's areas of weakness and provide direct instruction to meet their individual needs. This occurs across academic and social domains and involves a cross-disciplinary team and includes parent involvement. Supports are provided flexibly in response to rates of student growth. The team regularly reviews and reflects on student progress. As needed, additional supports are provided under IDEA guidelines and involve parents, teachers, and special education staff through the PPT process as mandated by the state. All IEPs are developed in consideration of units and skills necessary to facilitate inquiry-based learning. Student learning is reflected through progress reports at the end of each marking period and reviewed annually.

Our school-wide gifted program, the Quest Program, is intended to create an instructional environment which encourages intellectual, and social/ emotional development, including the demonstration of gifted behaviors. Multiple criteria are used to identify students on an ongoing basis. Identified students are given opportunities to conduct individual and small group in-depth investigations on self-selected topics; or to participate in the Odyssey of the Mind Challenge.

### **Assessment**

Assessment plays an important role in driving instruction to meet individual student needs. Effective assessment highlights rates of student growth and provides relevant information to inform instruction. We strive to utilize summative and formative assessments that are diversified to address individual needs. This includes alternative means of representation, expression and form across a variety of modalities. Assessment of the whole child is critical. Growth in communication, cooperation, independence, creativity, commitment and curiosity are valued in conjunction with academic progress. More specifically, we use state and district assessments, as well as progress monitoring, curriculum-based assessments and student reflections of Inquiry Units to gauge progress and growth. Across grades, we strive to create opportunities for all students to synthesize their learning in more sophisticated manners to prepare them for their culminating PYP exhibition project.

### **Four Principles of Good Practice**

- **Affirming Identity and Building Self-Esteem**

As a school community that values its diversity, we create an environment where all students feel pride in their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This helps promote self-esteem, international-mindedness and being a responsible citizen. All students at Charter Oak are provided the necessary tools to lead their own parent-teacher conference twice a year. This provides a forum to reflect on their learning and accomplishments with the support of their parents, classroom teacher and support staff. Taking a proactive approach, the school psychologist and social worker conduct weekly classroom lessons based on the Second Step Social Skills Curriculum, as well as additional opportunities to participate in team building and cooperative activities. Further instruction is provided to promote students' independence in problem solving, managing feelings, and expressing themselves appropriately. In addition, the Love and Logic Program is offered as an after school workshop for families interested in improving the behavior of their children at home. In order to provide counseling for students who come from a divorced or separated families, a Kids Group meets weekly after school. Within our school community, we hold student-led Recognition Assemblies and create Daily Announcements to highlight individual students who display the learner profiles and attitudes or take action at home and in school. To ensure that parents and the community feel welcome and invested in our school, we make an effort to honor everyone's unique cultural backgrounds by encouraging families to continue to speak in their native language, and share their

heritage and traditions. To the greatest extent possible, we seek to provide interpreters and written communications in native languages.

- **Valuing Prior Knowledge**

In consideration of educational research which emphasizes the role of prior knowledge, it is the view of COIA that all instruction is inclusive of each individual's prior learning and understandings. For optimal learning to take place, teachers will work to remove barriers and build upon a student's prior knowledge to instruct within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Teachers at COIA acknowledge that each child's individual experiences impact their prior knowledge, and instruction will be differentiated within tasks and assignments to correctly align prior knowledge and learning on an individualized basis. Teachers use the IB elements to record information, and inform their planning and future instruction. Additionally, in preparation of lessons, teachers evaluate student's prior knowledge, allowing for appropriate planning and time necessary to activate all students' prior knowledge. To activate and build prior knowledge and enhance learning, all students are involved in field trips, videoconferences, classroom visits from professionals, experiments, and inquiry circles.

- **Scaffolding**

Scaffolding techniques are a fundamental part of all teaching. This philosophy applies to all students, not just those with special learning needs or second-language learners. When teachers scaffold new learning, they allow learners to access a task that would otherwise be impossible or much more difficult to accomplish. Effective implementation of scaffolding requires that supports be gradually removed as instruction continues, so that students will eventually be able to demonstrate their understanding independently.

Some of the many scaffolding strategies that COIA teachers use to accommodate individual student needs include:

- Activate prior knowledge
- Offer a motivational context to foster student interest in the subject at hand
- Break a complex task into more manageable steps to facilitate student achievement
- Model the thought process for students through "think aloud" talk
- Provide verbal cues to prompt student answers
- Teach mnemonic devices to foster memorization of facts
- Use graphic organizers as a visual framework for information
- Pre-teach key vocabulary
- Use historical timelines as a context for learning
- Provide strategies for students to use during independent practice
- Use collaborative groupings and cooperative learning
- Manipulatives
- Assistive Technology

- Alternate forms of Assessment
- Dramatization

- **Extending Learning**

As students progress through the Primary Years Program, they will encounter increasingly challenging, higher-order thinking, and problem-solving tasks. Teachers at COIA encourage students to develop a love for learning that allows for continued intellectual curiosity where students look to interact with more complex instructional materials. To extend learning in English/Language Arts, Mathematics and content areas, teachers provide ample opportunities for students to have authentic interactions with rich texts across the genres, applied problem-solving and inquiry into central ideas. Teachers at COIA maximize students' learning time by utilizing sustained silent reading time, reading lab, math tutors, reading tutors, and after-school instructional programs, in addition to daily instruction. Furthermore, it is the view at COIA that rich text be accessible to all students. To maximize accessibility, assistive technology, such as text to speech software, iPad applications, and electronic books can be utilized to increase exposure to cognitively rich text for all students. Through regular home communication, we empower families to support learning at home by providing access to web-based educational supports and recommended resources.

In developing international-mindedness at Charter Oak, we see individual differences as opportunities for enriched learning so that all students can become “active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.”