

2024-2025 ATHENS AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT ANNUAL NOTICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

The **Athens Area School District** recognizes that every student has unique learning needs. These needs can be met through a variety of options including the regular class, supportive services within the regular class, special classes, and special schools. To develop an effective educational program for each student, identification activities are available to develop individual strengths and needs. This is done with the assistance of specially trained personnel to determine an appropriate educational program for each child. The process can be initiated by a written request from either school staff or parents. The Athens Area School District is committed to providing opportunities to all students to assist them in achieving their maximum potential. Thus, we provide a continuum of settings and services to accommodate each individual.

REFERRAL OF CHILDREN FOR SCREENING AND EVALUATION - As prescribed in section 1402 of the PA School Code, the Athens Area School District routinely conducts the following screenings: Hearing Acuity - Kindergarten through 3rd grades, 7th and 11th grades; Visual Acuity - Kindergarten registration, Kdg. through 12th grades by request; Speech/Language - Kindergarten -3rd grade, by referral and/or request; Dental - Grades 1, 3, and 7; Physicals - Kindergarten, grades 6 and 11. Identified needs from all these screening sources are noted within the child’s official file. Parents with concerns regarding their child may contact building principals at any time to request, in writing, a screening or evaluation. Communication with parents and exceptional students shall be in English or the native language of the parents.

SCREENING OF CHILDREN - Screening of children, using immediately available data sources such as health records, cumulative records, enrollment records and report cards, is conducted for hearing, vision, motor, and speech and language skills. Screening may lead to intervention by the Child Study Team (CST). This team is comprised of the building principal, regular classroom teacher, support teacher, and others as appropriate. The CST team will communicate with the parents about the child’s needs as well as instructional support services that will meet those needs. If a student does not demonstrate progress with the CST response to interventions, parents will be asked to give their written consent for the district to conduct individualized, professional assessments.

EVALUATION OF CHILDREN - No evaluation may be conducted without written parental permission. Before a formal evaluation can begin, parents are to be provided with the following information: Notification of who referred the child for an evaluation, Notification of why the child was referred, Opportunity to review the child’s school records, Procedures and types of evaluations to be conducted, General schedule of evaluation activities, Notification of rights of the parents regarding consent for evaluation. Evaluations are conducted by a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) to determine the child’s learning ability, behavior patterns, physical abilities, communication skills, and achievement levels. The team is made up of the parents, teacher, principal, school psychologist and others as appropriate. Methods used in the evaluation include observation, review of records, and group and individual testing. Information is gathered from parents, school personnel and medical personnel as needed. Results of the evaluation are reviewed by the team to determine if the child is eligible for and in need of special education services. Parents are a primary component of the team that determines if special education placement is recommended, determining the exceptionality, and in developing the Individual Education Program (IEP) for the child if needed.

INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION (IEE) - As a parent, you have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation for your child at public expense if you disagree with an evaluation conducted by Athens Area School District. An independent evaluation is an evaluation by a qualified professional who is not an employee of Athens Area School District. Within ten (10) days of receipt of a written request for an independent educational evaluation from you, the parent, the Special Services Office shall either: (1) Initiate a due process hearing and notify you in writing that the district has done so. (2) Issue you correspondence containing: An assurance that the school district will pay for an independent education evaluation as long as the evaluation consists of the administration of all testing and use of all assessment procedures required to rule in or rule out the existence of all legally defined disabilities that school staff, parents, or the evaluator reasonably suspect the child might have. A directive that the school district shall not pay for the evaluation until it receives a complete copy of a report of that evaluation directly from the evaluator. Directions that you, as the parent, are responsible for arranging for the evaluation and for ensuring the evaluator contacts the Director of Special Education in the Special Services Office (570) 888-7766 option 5 to arrange for payment of the evaluation. The Special Services Office maintains a list of qualified independent evaluators and shall make that list available to you upon request.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS - Each school district is obligated to provide appropriate special education programs, related services, and early intervention programs that are: Provided at no cost to parents; Provided under the authority of a school entity – directly, by referral, or by contract; Individualized to meet the educational or early intervention needs of the child; Designed to yield meaningful educational or early education benefits and progress; Designed to conform to an IEP.

Special education is designed to meet the needs of each exceptional student including “specially designed instruction conducted in the classroom, home, community settings, hospitals, institutions, or other settings. Instruction also is provided in skill areas such as physical education, speech, and vocational education.” Early Intervention programs are “appropriate programs of educational development, specially designed to meet the needs of eligible young children and address the strengths and needs of the family.” Programs are provided to children with needs in any of the following development areas: physical, sensory, cognitive, language and speech, social/emotional, and self-help. Anyone wishing to pursue these services should contact the Bradford, Lycoming, and Sullivan, Tioga Intermediate Unit #17 (BLaST) at 570-673-6001. Related services available to students may include transportation as well as developmental, corrective, or other supportive services that enable an exceptional student to benefit from his/her special education program such as speech and language services, school health services, and assistive technology services.

CHILDREN SERVED IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS - Special education services are available to children who have one or more of the following disabilities: autism/pervasive development disorder, emotional disturbance, neurological impairment, deafness/hearing impairment, specific learning disability, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, other health impairment – physical disability, speech and language impairment, blindness / visual impairment, and anyone determined by an MDT or IEP team to need services. Early Intervention services are available to children who are at least three years of age, but less than the age of beginning school (five), and who have one or more of the same disabilities listed above and/or a significant developmental delay. Early intervention does not include gifted services.

ATHENS AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS - The following programs are available in all district buildings: Learning Support - Speech & Language Support - Emotional Support –Life Skills Support – Autistic Support - Gifted Support - Psychological Services – Academically-based Occupational Therapy. Life Skills Support and Emotional Support programs are provided at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. The following services contracted through Intermediate Unit #17/BLaST: Hearing Support - Vision Support – Orientation and Mobility Services and Academically-based Physical Therapy. The district also maintains Autistic Support programs, for children kindergarten through 5th grade at the Lynch-Bustin and SRU Elementary Schools.

STUDENT RECORDS AND CONFIDENTIALITY - Intermediate units and school districts are required by law to keep records on all students receiving special education and early intervention services. Included in these records are birth date, address, telephone numbers, and other identifying information, achievement test results, psychological test results, teacher progress reports, comprehensive evaluation reports, routine medical records, and IEPs. Every two or three years, for each mandated re-evaluation, information is added to the file. Only school personnel are permitted to view a child’s file. Anyone else must have written permission from the parent for a release of information to either view or receive copies of anything within a protected file. Parents can review the child’s file and challenge the validity of any report or challenge the maintenance of information in the file. **Federal regulations give both natural parents access to their child’s educational records unless there is a court order, state statute, or legally binding document that prohibits access.** In accordance with 34 CFR § 300.624, please be advised of the following retention/destruction schedule for the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA), Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), and Keystone Exam related materials: *PSSA, Keystone Exam, and PASA test booklets will be destroyed one year after student reports are delivered for the administration associated with the test booklets. *PSSA and Keystone Exam answer booklets and PASA media recordings will be destroyed three years after completion of the assessment.

SURROGATE PARENTS - Federal legislation has established several measures to ensure the rights of handicapped children, including the right to a free and appropriate public education – sometimes referred to as FAPE. To ensure that this right is realized by the handicapped children whose parents or guardian is unknown or unavailable, the state requires that districts pursue a surrogate parent to represent the student. Districts must recruit, train, and select volunteer surrogate parents to aide in the identification of exceptional students and participate in the development of individualized educational programs. **If anyone is interested in obtaining more information on training to become a surrogate parent, they are directed to contact the Bureau of Special Education Office at 814-258-5649 or the Intermediate Unit #17/BLaST at 570-673-6001.**

NOTICE - For further information about these procedures or information about parent rights, mediation, due process procedures, or specific special education services, contact Mr. Corey Mosher, Director of Student Services, at the Student Services Office. The office is located at 100 Canal Street, Athens, PA 18810. The phone number is: 570-888-7766, option 5. The FAX number is (570) 882-6288.