

Mercer Area School District

Mission Statement

“The mission of the Mercer Area School District, a school and community partnership committed to excellence, is to prepare all students through a quality educational program to become responsible citizens and lifelong learners in the changing world.”

To that end we believe that ~

- *All students can learn*
- *Education is a partnership among parents, community, students and schools.*
- *Learning is a life-long process.*
- *Learning is measured in different ways.*
- *Educational improvement is an on-going process.*
- *All students learn at different rates.*
- *All students learn in different ways.*
- *Reading, writing and mathematics are the cornerstones of future learning.*
- *Education prepares people for changes.*
- *A safe, secure and positive environment enhances learning.*
- *Mutual respect and individual responsibility are important to learning.*

PUBLIC NOTICE

ON

SCREENING AND EVALUATION

The Mercer Area School District uses the following procedure for screening, identifying and evaluating specified needs of school-age students requiring special programs or services. Eligible students participating in the Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV Early Intervention program are transitioned into school age programs according to PDE Guidelines. The Mercer Area School District, as prescribed by Section 1402 of the School Code routinely conducts screening of a child's hearing acuity in the following grades: Kindergarten, 1, 2, 3, 7, 11 and all identified special needs students. Visual acuity is screened in every grade. Height and weight are checked yearly. Dental exams are conducted in Kindergarten, 3, and 7. Physical exams are conducted in Kindergarten, 6, and 11. Scoliosis screening is conducted in grades 6 and 7.

Speech and Language skills are screened in Kindergarten, 1 & 2. Teachers are also encouraged to make referrals throughout the school year.

Gross and fine motor skills, academic skills and social-emotional development skills are assessed by classroom teachers on an on-going basis.

District wide screening takes place yearly to identify students in need of educational assistance. A Child Study Team (CST) within the student's school meets on a regular basis to determine if a student is in need of classroom modification, educational assistance, or a Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation (MDE). Specified needs from the screening sources are noted. School records are always open and available to parents and only to school officials who have a legitimate "need to know" regarding the child. Information from the records is released to other persons or agencies only with the appropriate authorization. This involves written and signed permission by parents or age appropriate students.

The Mercer Area School District has a comprehensive testing program. The Pennsylvania Assessments in Mathematics, Reading, Science & Writing are all administered. Achievement tests are given to students in grades 2, 4, & 6. Tests of Cognitive Skills are given to students in grades 2, 4, and 7. The Pennsylvania Assessments in Mathematics and Reading are given to students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 11. PSSA Science Assessments are given in grades 4, 8, & 11. PSSA Writing Assessments are given in Grades 5, 8, and 11. Benchmark Assessments in Math and Reading are administered quarterly.

Parents with concerns regarding their student may contact Building Principals or the Special Ed Coordinator at any time to request a screening or evaluation of their child in writing. Communication with parents and exceptional students shall be in English or the native language of parents.

At both the elementary and secondary levels screening information will be reviewed by the CST Team which meets weekly for the Elementary School. ESAP—Elementary Student Assistance Program meets every Thursday. For the Middle / High School the SAP—Student Assistance Program meets on the 2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month. At either level, the team will consist of a School Counselor, Building Principal, Teacher, and any additional staff/individuals deemed appropriate to attend in order to determine if a child needs additional services. If it is determined that a child needs additional academic services, the CST / SAP Team will make recommendations relative to the child's learning style, behavior, physical inabilities and speech concerns to be more in keeping with traditional classroom experiences. If the student does not make progress, parents will be sent a Prior Written Notice and will be asked to give written permission for further individual professional evaluations.

If an evaluation is conducted, an Evaluation Report (ER) will be completed. This document summarizes data collected with parent input and includes specific recommendations for the types of intervention necessary to accommodate the child's specific needs. Parents are then invited to participate in a meeting where the results of the Multidisciplinary Team Evaluations (MDE) are discussed.

Parents have the right to obtain an Independent Educational Evaluation of their child. An Independent Educational Evaluation is an evaluation by a qualified professional who is not an employee of the school district responsible for the child. The parents may request an independent evaluation at Mercer Area School District's expense if they disagree with an educational evaluation completed by the district. Mercer Area School District must respond to the request within a reasonable time. However, Mercer Area School District will initiate a Due Process Hearing to show that its evaluation is appropriate. Parents may have an Independent Educational Evaluation at their own expense and the results must be considered by Mercer Area School District.

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed for the student qualifying for special placement. The IEP Team, with the parent(s), will consist of at least three district staff members:

- The Special Education Teacher(s)
- The Regular Education Teacher(s)
- The School Psychologist (for initial IEPS)
- The School Counselor
- The Local Education Agency Representative (LEA)
- Others as necessary

Parents are an integral part of the IEP Team and are encouraged to be physically present at the IEP meeting. The District makes every effort to ensure parent participation. The District sends a Prior Written Notice and notifies the parent in writing, makes documented phone calls, and makes home visits if necessary to make parents aware of the IEP conference and the need for parental participation. Parents are then presented a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement / Prior Written Notice (NOREP/PWN) with which they may agree or disagree. If the parents agree, the program is implemented. If parents disagree with the program being recommended, the issue may be taken to a Pre-Hearing Conference, Mediation or a Due Process Hearing.

Non-Discrimination Policy

The Mercer Area School District does not discriminate in its educational programs, activities or employment practices based on race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, ancestry, union membership, or any other legally protected category. This policy is in accordance with State Law, including the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, and with Federal Law, including Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Mercer Area School District employees and participants who have an inquiry or complaint of harassment or discrimination, or who need information about accommodations for persons with disabilities, should contact the Mercer Area School District Administrative Office, Mr. Ronald R. Rowe, Jr., Assistant Superintendent, at 724-662-5100 Ext. 10

Mercer Area School District Central Offices 545 West Butler Street Mercer, PA 16137

Dr. William D. Gathers, Ed.D.	Superintendent of Schools
Mr. Ronald R. Rowe, Jr.	Assistant Superintendent
Mrs. Shirley Spiegel, M.Ed.	Coordinator of Special Education
Mr. Michael Stabile	Business Manager / Board Secretary
Mr. Gary E. Bacon	Program Manager

Mercer Area School District Middle/Sr. High School 545 West Butler Street Mercer, PA 16137

Mr. Michael Piddington	Middle / Sr. High School Principal
Mr. Greg Acre	Dean of Students

Mercer Area School District Elementary School 301 Lamor Road Mercer, PA 16137

Mrs. Michelle Dietrich, M.Ed.	Elementary School Principal
Mrs. Shirley Spiegel, M.Ed.	Assistant Elementary Principal

Chapter 15 ~ Protected Handicapped Student

A Protected Handicapped Student is a student who is school age with a physical or mental disability that substantially limits or prohibits participation in or access to any aspect of the school program. In compliance with State and Federal Law, the School District provides to each protected handicapped student without discrimination or cost to the student or family, those related aides, services, or accommodations needed to provide equal opportunity to participate in and obtain the benefits of the school program and extra-curricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the student's abilities. These services and protections for "protected handicapped students" are different from those applicable to all eligible or exceptional students.

For further information on the evaluation procedures and provision of services to protected handicapped students contact Mr. Ronald R. Rowe, Jr., Assistant Superintendent, Mercer Area School District at 724-662-5100 Ext. 10.

"No Child Left Behind"

The "No Child Left Behind" Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandates that schools give parents information regarding:

- The achievement of their children
- The choices that they can make about their children's education
- The performance of their schools

The Mercer Area School District has revised their Policies and Procedures to ensure compliance with NCLB (No Child Left Behind). All of Mercer Area School District's teachers are properly certified for their teaching assignments and meet the NCLB Definition of Highly Qualified. Parents have the right to request certain information about the background and qualifications of their children's classroom teachers as required by NCLB, Section 1111 (H) (6) (A). If you would like to receive this information, contact the Office of the Superintendent 724-662-5100 Ext. 10.

Local Report Card

In order to inform parents and the public of the School's and the District's academic progress, the Mercer Area School District has its Local Report Card on the Mercer Area School District website. You may view the Mercer Area School District Report Card by accessing the District Web Page at www.mercer.k12.pa.us. Anyone not able to access the Web may contact the Office of the Superintendent at 724-662-5100 Ext 10 to review the Local Report Card. The Mercer Area School District website contains other updates and links.

Information about Early Intervention Program Services, Parental Rights, Mediation, or Due Process Procedures, Specific Special Education Services including Annual Public Notice and Programs offered by the District and the District's Education Records Policy are available upon request from the Special Education Coordinator or the Building Principal in the child's school.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Mercer Area School District operates programs for eligible students. Services for students identified as Gifted are no longer classified in the area of "Special Education". Gifted is now included under Chapter 16, and the District provides Gifted Support Programming for students in Grades K – 12.

Handicapped students are encouraged to participate with non-disabled students to the maximum extent appropriate in extra-curricular activities and non-academic services and activities. This benefit is extended to students who attend Approved Private Schools, Special Education Centers, Cross District Programs, and Homeschoolers.

There are a small number of students that cannot be accommodated in the public school setting, and therefore, require a placement in a special education center or, if deemed necessary, in an Approved Private School.

The District contracts with Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV for services to those students included in low incident populations. Itinerant Vision Support, Hearing Support, Occupational and Physical Therapy Services, Assistive Technology Services, and Audiological Services are provided if deemed necessary.

Special Education Programs Operated Within the District:

- Autistic Support
- Deaf / Hard of Hearing Support
- Emotional Support
- Language Impaired
- Learning Support
- Life Skills Support
- Speech & Language Support

Special Education Programs Operated Outside the District:

- Autistic Support
- Emotional Support
- Hearing Support
- Life Skills Support
- Multi-Disabilities Support
- Vision Support
- Residential Treatment Facility
- Approved Private School

Privacy Rights of Parents and Students

The Mercer Area School District and its employees are required by Federal Law and State and Federal Rules and Regulations to protect the rights of students. The foundation of these rights comes from Federal Legislation entitled the Family Educational Rights and Privacy (FERPA) Act of 1974 (also known as the Buckley Amendments), PPRA (Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment), and HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). All students are covered by the State Regulations contained in Chapter 12 known as Students' Rights and Responsibilities. In addition, State Rules and Regulations protect regular and special education students' rights and privacy.

The basic premise of these laws, rules, and regulations is that information about students cannot be disclosed without written parental consent. Education Records, which are maintained by an educational agency, consist of information directly related to a student. Personally identifiable information includes the student's name, the name of the parent or other family members, or a list of personal characteristics that would make the student's identity easily traceable.

Education records and personally identifiable information cannot be disclosed or released without written parental consent or if a student is over 18, without student consent.

There is certain information that can be released without consent. This is called Directory Information. Directory Information is information contained in an Educational record of a student which would not generally be considered harmful or invasive of privacy if disclosed. The Mercer Area School District designates what information is labeled as Directory Information. It shall include the following: the student's name, address, date and place of birth, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, degrees and awards received, and the most recent previous educational agency or institution attended by the student.

School records are always open and available to parents, and only school officials who have legitimate "need to know" information about the child. Disclosure of information means to permit access to the release, transfer, or other communication of education records or the personally identifiable information contained in these records, to any party, by any means including oral, written or electronic means. This means that information about a student cannot even be shared in conversation without permission. This also applies to other personnel who do not have an educationally relevant reason to access student information.

Written parental consent is necessary for disclosure of personally identifiable information and education records. If a student is over 18, these records cannot be released without student consent. The consent must: (1) Specify the records that may be disclosed; (2) State the purpose for the disclosure; (3) Identify the part or class or parties to whom the disclosure may be made. Furthermore, the School District maintains a

written record disclosure for parents to inspect in case information has been released. The School District may disclose education records without consent to officials of another School District in which a student seeks or intends to enroll. To comply with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Section 9528, School Districts may disclose the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of high school students upon request by military recruiters and institutions of higher learning unless individual students or their parents request that the information not be released without prior written consent. Students or parents requesting additional information should contact the Building Principal.

FERPA affords parents and students over 18 years of age the right to request the amendment of the student's education record that the parent or eligible student believes is inaccurate or misleading. Contact the Building Principal for procedure details.

Services for Preschool Age Children

The Pennsylvania Early Intervention Act 212 and Federal Law, IDEA, Part H provides for service for eligible children, age birth to three years of age. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare administers the Early Intervention Services for children birth to three. These services to children with developmental delays are locally provided through the Mercer County MH/MR Office. To schedule a developmental screening of your child please contact the Mercer County Behavioral Health Commission, Inc. - Melissa Hollen, EI Coordinator at 724-662-1550

The Early Intervention PA Act 212 and Federal Law Part B of IDEA provides for all children who are at least three years of age, but not yet of the age of beginners, who are thought to be eligible for Early Intervention Services. These services are administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Developmental screenings are conducted at Seventh Street School, 701 Seventh Street, Sharpsville, PA, 16150 by Intermediate Unit IV personnel in order to identify students who may have a developmental delay in one or more of the following areas: physical, cognitive, and/or sensory development, emotional development, and self-help skills. For further information or to request a developmental screening, please call the Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV Pre-School Office at 724-282-0517 or 1-800-345-0033, and contact Andrea Leahy, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM.

Services for students in the Non-Public Schools

Special Education services are accessible to eligible, resident students attending non-public schools by dual enrollment in the public and non-public school systems. Parents of a non-public school student who suspect their child may be disabled and in need of special education services may request a Multidisciplinary Team Evaluation of their child to determine the child's eligibility and need for special education services. This parental request may be submitted in writing to the non-public school system. The non-public school may then contact the Mercer Area School District, Coordinator of Special Education, Mrs. Shirley Spiegel, at 724-662-5102, Ext 5, to provide the evaluation.