



# Special Needs Policy

**Parkway Middle School**  
An IB World School  
Kissimmee, Florida  
The School District of Osceola County



## Philosophy

Parkway Middle School understands and realizes the individuality of our large and diverse population. We recognize that such uniqueness may include obstacles that affect the educational experience of our students. We are committed to meeting the multitude of academic, physical and other needs of our students through our policies and actions across campus. All stakeholders agree that inclusion is a necessity and priority to facilitate the academic success of each and every student. In order to ensure the equitable and high quality education that we strive for at Parkway Middle School our students are encouraged to embrace and exemplify the traits of the IB Learner Profile that will create a positive and judgment-free environment.

Students who value the educational experience for *all* are:

- Inquirers** - One who possesses the skills to become informed on different perspectives;
- Principled** - One who regards others respectfully and takes responsibility for their own actions;
- Open-minded** - One who is open to and respects the differences of others;
- Risk Takers** - One who approaches challenges confidently and preserves the rights of others;
- Caring** - One who is sensitive to the needs of others;
- Reflective** - One who considers the implications of their actions and ways to improve.
- Communicators** - One who can express ideas and concepts clearly and articulately in the designated language.

It is through these qualities that Parkway Middle School students will assist in creating a school climate that not only acknowledges the special needs of the student body, but one that also appreciates and thrives off of the diversity on campus. Such practices will be introduced, modeled and encouraged in each classroom and all areas on campus.

## Special Educational Needs (SEN)

In alignment with the International Baccalaureate Organization, Parkway Middle School identifies special educational needs students as having a recognized, diagnosed special educational need (SEN), while others have not yet been diagnosed. These special needs include:

Specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia and dyscalculia)  
Language and communication disorders (such as aphasia, dysphasia and articulation problems)  
Emotional and behavioral difficulties  
Physical disabilities affecting mobility  
Sensory impairments (such as visual or hearing difficulties)  
Medical conditions (such as asthma, epilepsy and diabetes)  
Mental health conditions (i.e. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, eating disorders, anxiety, etc.)  
The needs of gifted and talented students.

## **Inclusion**

The stakeholders of Parkway Middle School understand that our students have come from a plethora of different backgrounds. We recognize and appreciate the variety of needs of our students. We are committed to providing each student, regardless of special educational needs, with a quality education. In order to do so Parkway Middle School, in alignment with the International Baccalaureate Organization, believe that inclusion is an ongoing process that aims to increase access and engagement in learning for all students by identifying and removing barriers. We encourage a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, support and problem solving.

Inclusion practices are flexible and support changes in policies and practices. As such, all stakeholders support the concept of lifelong learning and the following principles of an inclusive education:

- The culture, policies and practices of the school shall be developed to include all students.
- All stakeholders shall provide insight regarding educational choices for students
- The interests of all students must be protected.
- Barriers to the educational experience, including learning and participation, shall be removed by the authorizing bodies of the school.
- All students should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential.
- Successful inclusion of the majority of students with special educational needs in mainstream education (with skills training, strategies and support).
- An understanding that mainstream education will not always be appropriate for every student all of the time; however, there may be particular stages where it is appropriate for a student to receive mainstream education.

## **Federal and State Requirements**

Florida's educational standards and accountability system support the requirements of federal laws regarding participation of students with disabilities in standards-based instruction and assessment initiatives. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), reauthorized in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act, holds states accountable for the achievement of all students.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) governs services provided to students with disabilities. School districts must follow established procedures to identify and evaluate students who are suspected of having a disability. The individual educational plan (IEP) documents the services required to meet the students' needs. Both laws (ESEA and IDEA) require students with disabilities to participate in statewide assessments. Students receive assessment accommodations to meet their individual needs.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal law that protects the rights of students with disabilities enrolled in public schools receiving federal funds. Section 504 requires school districts to provide a free appropriate public education to each qualified student with a disability (permanent or temporary). Students with disabilities may have accommodations for instruction and assessment.

Chapter 1008 (Assessment & Accountability) of the 2016 Florida Statutes mandates test accommodations and identifies criteria for extraordinary exemptions of state assessments such as FSA, NGSSS, FSAA, and EOC (required for high school credit courses).

## **Eligibility**

Students are eligible for accommodations after they have been properly evaluated and determined eligible for services. The Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a process that provides intervention and educational support to all students at increasingly levels of intensity based on their individual needs. The goal is to prevent problems and intervene early so that students can be successful with academics and behavior. Improvement for delivery of services to students with disabilities is an ongoing process. The MTSS team consists of the Guidance Counselor, School Psychologist, Resource Compliance Specialist, Dean(s) of Students, Principal, Assistant Principal(s) and the Pedagogical Leadership Team. The team meets monthly to discuss concerns and strategies.

The MTSS team will monitor student behavior and academics to determine if the student is responding to the prescribed interventions. If the student is deemed a *non-responder*,

the team may request a special education evaluation that includes cognitive, academic and behavioral testing. Based upon the results of the evaluation(s) and the needs of the student, a 504 plan may be developed through the Guidance Department or an Individual Education Plan (IEP) may be developed through the ESE Department via an IEP Committee. For both departments, the student's current level of academic achievement, functional performance, and the effect of the disability (permanent or temporary) will be considered in the development of the appropriate plan for the student. Both departments will document all determinations regarding the need for an IEP or 504 plan. Documented evidence must show that the student is eligible for services through one of these plans. IEP and 504 plans are reviewed every three years, unless the plan is temporary or the student changes schools prior to the three years.

## **Special Needs under Section 504**

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a disabled individual is defined as any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. Major life activities include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working (Rule 6A-19.001, F.A.C.).

A careful analysis is required to determine if the student has an impairment or condition that is severe enough to limit a major life activity and whether the student is qualified to receive aids, services, or accommodations for instruction and assessment, including the FSA, NGSSS, FSAA, and EOC assessments. Students with a temporary disability, such as a broken arm, may require accommodations for a limited time. A Section 504 plan may be developed for the student to access accommodations. The student must use the accommodation regularly in the instructional setting. For example, the student with the broken arm will need an accommodation for writing in classroom activities as well as for any state assessments.

## **Selection of Accommodations**

Through the IEP or Section 504 planning process, a team of professionals, family members, and the student makes decisions about which accommodations the student needs for instruction and for State of Florida / Osceola County School District assessments. The team considers the student's learning and behavior characteristics. The need for or type of accommodation is not determined by the disability category. The team will utilize information from the evaluation in order to determine the need for any accommodations, as well as the type of accommodation that may be necessary.

The team will use a process to gather information in a systematic manner to guide decisions about services and supports for students with disabilities. The SETT Framework is a planning tool that considers the Student, the Environment, the Tasks, and the Tools (SETT). The framework helps the members of the team gather information and explore issues across a comprehensive set of factors. They use this information to determine what accommodations and services may be needed.

When considering accommodations, it is important to obtain input from everyone involved - including the parents, ESE staff, and teachers who will be responsible for delivering the accommodations. The team should also include the student when making decisions about accommodations. At Parkway Middle School, the team consists of the Local Education Agency representative (Parkway's RCS), ESE teacher, General Education teacher, Parent / Guardian, and the student. The student can provide important insights into accommodations that are both acceptable and needed. In situations where the student is not comfortable using a particular accommodation because it makes them uncomfortable, the team must arrange for another option.

It is important to measure the effect of the accommodations to verify the student's need. Data collected before and after the implementation of the accommodation can show whether the accommodation improves student performance. The IEP or Section 504 planning team will also base their decision for continuation of the accommodation on student data.

## **General Guidelines for Accommodations**

At Parkway Middle School, accommodations do not reduce learning expectations. When a change in the instruction or assessment activity lowers the expectations for student learning, it is considered a modification and the outcomes for learning are substantially reduced. Modifications are not provided for students on the summative assessment within each unit of instruction. Students with special educational needs are held to the same learning objectives and criterion, as identified by the International Baccalaureate Organization and discussed in Parkway Middle School's Assessment Policy. Parkway Middle School stakeholders understand that by changing the learning expectations (through modifications) during instruction or assessments, the student's opportunity to learn critical concepts is greatly reduced. Parkway Middle School's standard is to focus on the accommodations necessary for each student during instructional practices so that the student may meet the appropriate MYP objectives. The following guidelines should be considered when making decisions about accommodations for instruction and assessment:

- Accommodations should facilitate an accurate demonstration of what the student knows or can do

- Accommodations should not provide the student with an unfair advantage or interfere with the validity of the test. They must not change the underlying skills the test measures.
- Accommodations for the FSA, NGSSS, FSAA, and EOC assessments must be the same or nearly the same as the student uses in classroom instruction and classroom assessment activities. The Test Administrator Manual for each State of Florida assessment will also be referenced to clarify permitted accommodations for state assessments.
- Accommodations must be necessary for the student to demonstrate knowledge, ability, or skill.

The student may need certain kinds of accommodations for specific assignments or learning activities. Teachers are encouraged to provide such accommodations on a trial basis as long as they fit within these decision-making guidelines. A list of accommodations may be found in the Third Edition (2010) of *Accommodations: Assisting Students with Disabilities* which is available through the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, Florida Department of Education. It is important to understand that possible accommodations are not limited to that list.