

Small Group Placement Option

Cranford High School

Philosophy of educating students with disabilities

Simply stated, our philosophy is that all students can learn. Students learn in a caring and supportive environment. Students benefit when teachers work together rather than in isolation. Our general education and special education teachers share students, goals, knowledge, and decision making. Including students with special needs with non-disabled peers enhances their social and emotional growth and well being.

We base our philosophy on current research and learning theory. There is extensive research that supports small class size and the link between teacher content knowledge and student achievement. Findings from brain based research support active student participation and reflective practices. To promote the transfer of knowledge, students must see connections to the real world.

Teachers must know their students' strengths and weaknesses to differentiate instruction that will address individual learning needs. The practice of looping allows students to work with a teacher for two years, which enhances an already established relationship.

Ongoing formative assessment is vital in order to adjust instructional methods and to assess student progress. Alternate methods of assessment allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in different ways.

Description of practice, including the length of time practice has been in place and projected population

Small Group Instruction is designed for the low achieving student who has a strong work ethic, is motivated to learn, and demonstrates the following characteristics:

- Initiates and takes responsibility for learning
- Demonstrates organizational and study skills
- Is able and willing to work independently in classroom situations and perseveres when challenged
- Maintains self-discipline, integrity, and respect

Small Group Instruction has been an option for students with and without IEP's for the past four years at Cranford High School in all content areas. We have two options for students who can benefit from a small group setting.

In the first setting, two teachers, a general education teacher and a special education teacher, co-teach an academic class that does not exceed 15 students.

In science classes, with a lab, an even number of students is recommended (not to exceed 14). It should be noted that this is the first year that any of our academic classes have been co- taught by a general education teacher and special education teacher as an option for all struggling students. Our goal is to continue this option next year, specifically focusing upon increased class options within departments where we have already initiated the service this year. This model differs from In-class support which continues to be an option for students with special needs

whose needs are not as significant as those recommended for a small group setting. Students in ICS have skills that are close to grade level; and these students are able to succeed in a larger class that may move at a faster pace, with assistance and support from an ICS teacher.

The small group guidelines are meant to create a general profile; students are not required to have all characteristics in order to be appropriate for the category.

- Significantly (at least 2 years) below grade level
- Require ongoing review, reinforcement, and repetition of previous skills
- Unable to transfer or generalize skills and/or memory deficit
- Need information chunked and more frequent tests on smaller units
- Need concept load reduced and a slower pace of instruction
- Need skill building to understand content
- Has difficulty with social interaction and communication
- Excessive need for teacher supervision and/or assistance
- Need considerable assistance for completing fine motor tasks
- Instruction needs to be designed to accommodate the diverse learning styles of the students
- Tasks need to be presented in small step by step increments

At the present time this option has eliminated the need for several replacement resource center classes. This decision was, in part, in response to the students' performance on the state assessments. Results were examined for students in all

levels within the general education setting, including college prep, standard, and small group, as well as the replacement class.

In the second setting, a subject specific general education teacher instructs a class of students that does not exceed 15. In science classes, with a lab, an even number of students is recommended (not to exceed 14). These guidelines are meant to provide a general profile; students are not required to have all of the characteristics in order to be appropriate for the category.

- Slightly below grade level
- Need minimal assistance to recall/retain information
- Need information chunked and more frequent tests on smaller units
- Same content/curriculum is covered, but materials are at an appropriate reading level
- Can work independently and with others with minimal support and assistance
- Require ongoing review, reinforcement, and repetition of previous skills
- Need a small group setting to take academic risks
- Behavior and social interactions are appropriate

The number of students varies from year to year, depending on student need. Our intention is to be able to address the needs of more students without IEPs who may benefit from this model of instruction.

How this practice reflects district philosophy

Our district's initiative of Teaching for Understanding promotes students actively engaged in worthy content, ongoing formative assessment, and student reflections. In both settings, students with and without IEP's who have special learning needs have an opportunity to receive instruction from a content area specialist in an environment with typical peers. Having the option of the class that is co-taught by a general education teacher and special education teacher provides an environment for students who have more significant needs to have access to the general education curriculum and a weekly lab experience. Student reflection and self assessment allows students to take some ownership for their progress. Consideration of individual learning needs provides a safe and supportive learning experience for students with various academic abilities.