



Universal Charter Schools

Annual Notice of Services for Students with Disabilities Including Special Education and Protected Handicapped Students

Annual Public Notice – Part I

Universal Charter Schools provides special education and related services to resident children with disabilities who are ages three (3) through twenty-one (21). The purpose of this notice is to describe (1) the types of disabilities that might qualify the child for such programs and services, (2) the special education program and related services that are available, (3) the process by which the public schools screen and evaluate such students to determine eligibility, and (4) the special rights that pertain to such children and their parents or legal guardians.

Notice to Parents

According to state and federal regulations, annual public notice to parents of children who reside within a school district, intermediate unit and charter school is required regarding child find responsibilities. This notice shall inform parents of the child find identification activities and of the procedures followed to ensure confidentiality of information pertaining to students with disabilities or eligible young children. In addition to this public notice, each school district, intermediate unit and charter school shall publish written information in their handbook and on their website.

Children ages three (3) through twenty-one (21) can be eligible for special education programs and services. If parents believe that their school-age child may be eligible for special education services, please refer to the Universal Charter Schools contact list at the end of this public notice.

Children age three through the age of admission to first grade are also eligible if they have developmental delays and, as a result, need Special Education and related services. Developmental delay is defined as a child who is less than the age of beginners and at least 3 years of age and is considered to have a developmental delay when one of the following exists: (i) The child's score, on a developmental assessment device, on an assessment instrument which yields a score in months, indicates that the child is delayed by 25% of the child's chronological age in one or more developmental areas. (ii) The child is delayed in one or more of the developmental areas, as documented by test performance of 1.5 standard deviations below the mean on standardized tests. Developmental areas include cognitive, communicative, physical, social/emotional and self-help. For additional information you may contact **Elwyn SEEDS, located at 4025 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104 or via telephone at (215) 222-8054.**

Evaluation Process

Each school district, intermediate unit and charter school has a procedure in place by which parents can request an evaluation. For information about procedures applicable to your child, contact the school where your child attends. Telephone numbers and addresses can be found at the end of this notice. Parents of preschool age children, age three through five, may request an evaluation in writing by addressing a letter to *Elwyn SEEDS at 4025 Chestnut Street, 2nd Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19104.*

Program Development and Consent

Once the evaluation process is completed, a team of qualified professionals and parent(s) determine whether the child is eligible. If the child is eligible, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meets, develops the program and determines the educational placement. Once the IEP team develops the program and determines the educational placement, the Universal Charter School will issue a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP). School entities cannot proceed with an evaluation, or with the initial provision of special education and related services without the written consent of the parents. Parents have the right to revoke consent after the initial placement. For additional information related to consent, please refer to the Procedural Safeguards Notice which can be found on the PaTTAN website, www.Pattan.net or at your Universal Charter School.

Confidentiality of Information

Universal Charter Schools maintain records concerning all students enrolled in the students' respective school, including students with disabilities. All records are maintained in the strictest confidentiality. Your consent, or the consent of an eligible student who has reached the age of majority under State law, must be obtained before personally identifiable information is released, except as permitted under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The age of majority in Pennsylvania is 21. Each charter school must protect the confidentiality of personally identifiable information at collection, storage, disclosure and destruction stages. One official at each charter school must assume responsibility for ensuring the confidentiality of any personally identifiable information. Each charter school must maintain, for public inspection, a current listing of the names and positions of those employees within the agency who have access to personally identifiable information.

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.

For additional information related to student records, parents can refer to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Annual Public Notice – Part II

Child Find

It is the policy of all Universal Charter Schools that all students with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disability, who are in need of special education and related services, are identified, located and evaluated. This responsibility is required by a Federal law titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA. PA Chapter 711, for charter school services and programs for children with disabilities, requires the publication of a notice to parents sufficient to inform parents of children applying to or already enrolled in a Universal Charter School of (1) available special education services and programs, (2) how to request those services and programs, and of (3) systematic screening activities that lead to the identification, location and evaluation of children with disabilities enrolled in a Universal Charter School. The purpose of this Annual Notice is to comply with the schools' obligations under PA Chapter 711. This Annual Notice is made available both in the schools' Parent-Scholar Handbook and on the schools' website: <http://universalfamilyofschools.org/our-schools/>. Additionally, each Universal Charter School must prominently display a Child Find poster explaining the procedure for requesting evaluation.

Types of Disabilities that Qualify for Special Education and Related Services

Under the IDEA, there are two requirements for a student to qualify for special education programming and related services. The first requirement is a finding that the student has one, or more, of the following disabilities that interfere with his/her educational performance: (1) Autism, (2) Deaf-Blindness, (3) Deafness, (4) Emotional Disturbance, (5) Hearing Impairment, (6) Intellectual Disability, (7) Multiple Disabilities, (8) Orthopedic Impairment, (9) Other Health Impairment, (10) Specific Learning Disability, (11) Speech or Language Impairment, (12) Traumatic Brain Injury, and/or (13) Visual Impairment, including Blindness. The second requirement in determining eligibility for special education programming and related services is a finding by the school's Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation Team (MDET) that the student identified with one, or more, of these disabilities is in need of Specially Designed Instruction.

The legal definitions of the above-referenced disabilities, which all public schools are required to apply under the IDEA, may differ from those used in medical or clinical practice. These legal definitions could apply to students with disabilities that have very different identified medical or clinical disorders. A child with an Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, for example, could qualify for special education programming and related services as a child with Other Health Impairment, Emotional Disturbance, or Specific Learning Disability if the student meets the eligibility criteria under one, or more, of these disability categories and if the student needs special education programming and related services as a result.

Parent Request for an Evaluation

A parent may request, at any time, that the charter school conduct a multi-disciplinary evaluation. Potential signs of a student having a qualifying disability may include experiencing years of difficulties in reading, writing or solving math problems, difficulties focusing and concentrating on schoolwork, difficulties sitting still in the classroom and difficulties controlling emotions and/or behaviors. Requests for a multidisciplinary evaluation made be verbally communicated or in writing to the charter school's Principal or any staff member. If a parent makes an oral request for an evaluation, the charter school is required to provide the parent with a Pennsylvania Department of Education form to complete requesting additional information that substantiates the request.

Universal Charter Schools Systematic Screening and Referral Processes

The Student Support Team at each Universal Charter School is responsible for making informed decisions regarding the need for the establishment or the continuation of pre-referral intervention activities, or the necessity to make a referral for a Special Education Evaluation. All Universal Charter Schools employ a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as a systematic screening and referral process.

The Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a systematic, continuous improvement framework in which data-based problem solving and decision making is practiced across all levels of a Universal Charter School for supporting students both academically and behaviorally. Within the framework there are three levels of instructional and intervention supports referred to as tiers. Each tier increases with intensity based upon an individual student's presenting needs. Students' needs are addressed by designing, developing and implementing appropriate supports. The hierarchical tiers of instruction and behavioral supports are available to all students with an increase in intensity related to an individual's specific degree of need and data-based decision making.

The tiers represent instructional and behavioral supports so as a student responds positively to the individually designed interventions, supports may gradually fade. Conversely, if a student continues to present with difficulties despite the provision of varied interventions and practices, the level of intensity can increase.

The MTSS process schedules students for tiered support based on a review of PSSA performance data, school-based assessments and observation by the Student Support Team. The Student Support Team focuses on student-centered problem solving in an effort to assist staff with students who are not responding satisfactorily to traditional classroom instruction. The Student Support Team, based on data related to the student's progress, can make adjustments to a student's tiered interventions on an ongoing basis.

While the MTSS systematic process of proactive instructional interventions and behavioral supports targets a student's individual needs, the Student Support Team can use the acquired MTSS data for a student who demonstrates limited progress or skill regression to make a recommendation for a Special Education Evaluation.

Note: Parents have the right to request a Special Education Evaluation at any time, regardless of the outcome of the MTSS process. Moreover, pre-referral intervention activities may not serve as a bar to the right of a parent to request a Special Education Evaluation, at any time, including prior to or during the implementation of screening or pre-referral MTSS intervention activities.

Evaluation

When a student is referred for a Special Education Evaluation, every Universal Charter School must obtain written consent from the parent before the evaluation can be conducted. Parental consent for an evaluation shall not be construed as consent for their child to receive special education programming and related services. In certain circumstances, a surrogate parent may be appointed. A surrogate parent must be appointed when no parent can be identified; a public agency, after reasonable efforts, cannot locate a parent; the child is a ward of the State under the laws of Pennsylvania, or the child in an unaccompanied homeless youth. The surrogate parent may represent the child in all matters relating to the identification, evaluation and educational placement of the child. Reasonable efforts must be made to ensure the assignment of surrogate parent not more than 30 days after it is determined that the child needs a surrogate parent.

The IDEA requires an evaluation to encompass a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the student, including information provided by the parent(s) that may assist in determining whether the student has a disability and contribute to the content of the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). This process is conducted by a Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation Team (MDET) which includes a teacher(s), other qualified professionals who work with the student, the parent(s) and other members as required by law. The multi-disciplinary team evaluation process must be conducted in accordance with specific timelines and must include procedural safeguards procedures. As required by state and federal law, Universal Charter Schools do not use any single measure or assessment as a sole criterion for determining whether a student has a disability and for determining an appropriate educational program for a student. Research-based instruments are used to assess the relative contribution of cognitive, academic and behavioral factors in addition to physical or developmental factors.

The results of the multi-disciplinary evaluation are written in a report entitled an Evaluation Report (ER). This report makes recommendations about a student's eligibility for special education based on the presence of a disability *and* the need for specially designed instruction. If the student's Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation Team determines that the student is eligible for special education and related services, then a detailed plan for supporting the student in his/her area(s) of need over the coming year is written. This Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is

written so that the student receives the necessary program and services to make meaningful educational progress toward his/her individual goals.

Programs and Services for Children with Disabilities

Each Universal Charter School, in collaboration with the parent(s), determines the type and intensity of special education that a particular student needs based exclusively on the unique program of special education and related services that the school develops for that child. Therefore, an IEP is different for each student. An IEP Team consists of educators, parents, and other persons with special expertise or familiarity with the child. The participants in the IEP Team are dictated by the IDEA.

The parent(s) of the student have the right to be notified of and to be offered participation in all meetings of their student's IEP Team. The IEP is revised as often as circumstances warrant, but reviewed at least annually. The law requires that the program and placement of the student, as described in the IEP, be *reasonably calculated to ensure meaningful educational benefit to the student*. In accordance with the IDEA, there may be situations in which the charter school may hold an IEP team meeting if the parent(s) refuse or fail to attend the IEP team meeting. IEPs generally contain: (1) a statement of present levels of academic achievement and functional performance; (2) a statement of measurable annual goals established for the student; (3) a statement of how the student's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and when periodic reports will be provided; (4) a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided; (5) an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with non-disabled students in the regular education class and in activities; (6) a statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the student on State and school assessments; and (7) the projected date for the beginning of the services and modifications and the anticipated frequency, location and duration of those services or modifications.

Special education services are provided according to the educational needs of the student, not the category of disability. Types of service that may be provided depending upon the student's disability and needs include: (1) learning support; (2) life skills support; (3) emotional support; (4) deaf or hearing-impaired support; (5) blind-visually impaired support; (6) physical support; (7) autistic support; (8) multiple disabilities support and (9) speech and language support.

Related services are designed to enable the student to participate in or access his/her program of special education. Examples of related services that a student may require include but are not limited to: speech and language therapy, transportation, occupational therapy, physical therapy, school nursing services, audiologist services, counseling, or training. Related services, including psychological counseling, are provided at no cost to parents.

Universal Charter Schools ensure students with disabilities are educated to the maximum extent possible in the regular education environment or least restrictive environment. To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students who are not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling or other removal of students with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general education classes, even with the use of supplementary aids and services, cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 14, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals and transition services needed to assist in reaching those goals. Universal Charter Schools must invite the student to the IEP team meeting at which the transition plan is developed.

Services for Students with Disabilities, Other Than Special Education Services

Under Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, some school-age students with disabilities who do not meet the eligibility criteria for special education services (an identified disability and the need for specially designed instruction) may be eligible for special protections and for adaptations and accommodations in instruction, facilities and activities. Students are entitled to such protections, adaptations and accommodations if they have a mental or physical disability that substantially limits or prohibits participation in or access to an aspect of the school program.

Universal Charter Schools ensure that Section 504 students have equal opportunity to participate in the school's program and activities to the maximum extent appropriate. In compliance with applicable state and federal laws, Universal Charter Schools provide to each Section 504 student, without discrimination or cost to the student or family, those related aids, services or accommodations which are needed to provide equal opportunity to participate in and obtain the benefits of the school program and extracurricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the student's abilities.

These services and protections for Section 504 students may be distinct from those applicable to students eligible for special education services. Universal Charter Schools or the parent(s) may initiate an evaluation if they believe a student is a protected student with a disability. For further information on the evaluation procedures and provision of services to protected students, parents should contact their respective charter school's administrative office.

Universal Charter Schools

Universal Alcorn Charter School
3200 Dickinson Street
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Phone: 215-952-6219
Principal: Aaron Starke

Universal Institute Charter School
1415 Catharine Street
Philadelphia, PA 19146
Phone: 215-732-2876
Principal: Jeffrey Williams

Universal Audenried Charter High School
3301 Tasker Street
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Phone: 215-952-4801
Fax: 267-909-9425
Principal: Joshua Anderson

Universal Vare Charter School
2100 S. 24th Street
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Phone: 215-952-8611
Principal: Karen Howell-Toomer

Universal Creighton Charter School
5401 Tabor Avenue
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Phone: 215-537-2531
Principal: Wendy Baldwin