

RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL  
**DISTRICT CURRICULUM ACCOMODATION PLAN**  
JULY 2018

*The Mission of the River Valley Charter School is to provide a rigorous academic program based on the Montessori philosophy and rooted in the history, culture, and ecology of the Merrimack River Valley. Students will reach their full potential as scholars and as self-reliant, productive members of society. They will be adept at critical thinking and creative problem solving and will be fully prepared to succeed in future schools, careers and civic life.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Massachusetts General Laws, Laws C. 71, & 38Q1/2, require the adoption and implementation of a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP). The plan is intended to guide principals and general education teachers in ensuring that all possible efforts have been made to meet student's needs in the general education classroom and to support teachers in analyzing and accommodating a diverse range of student learning styles. The DCAP describes the school's systemic plan, rather than an individualized student plan, and it supports the idea that the best results are achieved when learning issues are addressed early, within the general education setting, and with a collaborative approach. It includes strategies and resources available to teachers in their quest to address the diverse learning styles of their students, outside of the special education arena.

### **The DCAP ensures that all efforts have been made to meet the diverse learning needs of students in the general education classroom.**

The RVCS DCAP lays out both formal and informal routes for supporting all learners at River Valley Charter School. In some instances, communication between parents and teachers will be effective in identifying issues and agreeing upon strategies to be implemented. In other situations, the Student Support Team (SST) will be involved in the process and a more formal written plan may result. In conjunction with SST, the DCAP provides a framework for the identification of accommodations, learning supports, and interventions that can lead to improved learning outcomes in the general education classroom. The range of interventions may include, but are not limited to, adjustments in curriculum and/or teaching strategies, enhanced support services within the classroom or from an external resource, the addition of different teaching materials, etc. For all students, universal screeners may be used in support of the process for data-based identification of students and for progress monitoring.

The targeted areas for the DCAP, as defined by the statute are:

- Analysis of diverse learning styles within gen-ed classroom
- Accommodations to meet diverse learning needs with the gen-ed classroom
- Provision of support and services in the gen-ed classroom
- Services for children whose behavior may interfere with learning
- Encouragement of parental involvement
- Encouragement of teacher mentoring and collaboration
- Assistance to gen-ed staff through professional development and collaboration

## CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR PUBLIC MONTESSORI CLASSROOMS

River Valley Charter School (RVCS) provides a high-quality Montessori program within the public-school arena. The school maintains its commitment to the Montessori pedagogy by hiring Montessori-trained and/or certified teachers in every classroom whenever possible. Every classroom in grades K through six has a full-time lead teacher and a full-time assistant teacher, which is a core component of the Montessori approach. Our classrooms are outfitted with genuine Montessori learning materials and furniture, which are essential to creating a prepared Montessori learning environment. We offer individualized instruction, hands-on learning, extended daily learning periods, multi-age classrooms, frequent student collaboration and student-directed learning; all hallmarks of the Montessori philosophy and well suited to support the needs of all learners within the general education classroom.

Montessori education is centered upon a whole-child approach to learning. Our primary goal is to help children reach their full potential both academically and personally, while instilling in them a sense of their place in the world and their responsibilities as productive members of society. To the maximum extent possible, our public educational program seeks to meet children where they are developmentally rather than requiring students to follow a standardized timeline for learning. To achieve this we use level-based Learning Goals that describe what students should know and be able to do by the end of a level, i.e., by the end of kindergarten, third grade, sixth grade, and eighth grade. The curriculum is designed to develop the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive elements of each student, and our commitment is to all of these areas of student development.

**Individualized Instruction:** With two teachers in every classroom, instruction is individualized to the greatest extent possible. Teachers provide lessons based on both their Montessori training and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Lessons are given in small group settings and are customized to meet the learning needs of each student. Our individualized approach to instruction allows teachers to customize curriculum and assessment for every child, assessing each student's readiness to learn, and to respond to academic, personal, social or emotional concerns directly. Work is assigned to students based on their current level of achievement and their readiness to learn new concepts and skills. By having a second adult in the classroom, enhanced learning supports can be implemented more easily within the classroom.

**Hands-on Manipulatives:** Maria Montessori pioneered the now widely-accepted principle that the work of the hand informs the learning of the mind. Given this fundamental belief, Montessori classrooms are designed to provide active learning to all students. All of our grade K-6 are stocked with the appropriate Montessori learning materials to support learning in literacy and mathematics, as well as other core subjects. Montessori materials allow students to manipulate learning materials in order to experience the concrete representation of a given concept.

**Extended Blocks of Learning Time:** The River Valley curricular approach is one of mastery learning rather than of simply covering concepts. Our Curriculum Maps identify all learning goals for each level, yet our teachers have the flexibility to present concepts in various manners to suit the learning pace and style of each student. Rather than structuring the day to assign a limited amount of time to each subject area, our Montessori approach provides both students and teachers complete flexibility in the time they choose to devote to any given pursuit. When a student, or group of students, demonstrates a particular interest in exploring a concept, question, or issue more deeply, the Montessori philosophy calls for teachers to

facilitate such interest.

**Multi-age Classrooms** enrich the curriculum options by offering students the opportunity to learn from and teach each other as well. It also increases the breadth of curriculum being taught within the classroom thus providing opportunities for remediation, without stigma, for students who need it. Similarly, for students who are able, it provides opportunities for students to advance, eliminating behavioral issues that often occur when students are bored. Much of the student work is project-based, and students frequently have a voice in the topics they research.

**Multi-modal Teaching and Learning:** Students are physically active during classroom learning periods, allowing kinesthetic learners to access their strengths, and all students to develop independence and remain engaged in their learning. Students are free to move about the classroom; they rarely learn in a sit-and-listen format. Our place-based learning focus also provides students multiple opportunities to actively engage in learning experiences outside the school walls. Curricular content is related to other parts of the curriculum to ensure connections are made and learning is reinforced.

**Student Collaboration:** Much of the learning that happens at River Valley happens between students. Though direct instruction is provided to every student every day, students spend a large portion of the learning time working with each other. Classrooms are furnished with group tables and provide open floor space for group work, and all students are encouraged to work together on many assignments. This approach not only fosters collaboration, but also provides students the opportunity to articulate their thinking to others, which helps to deepen their comprehension. River Valley students regularly work in groups (often multi-aged) to explore concepts in science, history and humanities. Project work expectations typically include both reporting and presentation (often multi-media), and our students are responsible for collaborating to assure successful execution of these expectations, modeling the skills required for success beyond the school environment.

**Behavioral Expectations:** At all levels, lessons are given on “grace and courtesy,” a Montessori expression used to help students reflect on and learn how to be respectful and at peace with themselves and with others. Each of our classroom communities also develops social contracts at the beginning of each school year defining the expectations and conditions for peaceful, respectful, and productive learning environments. Classrooms for our younger students contain “peace corners,” where students can go for a quiet moment to help them feel centered and ready-to-learn, or where two students can speak together to resolve differences.

## **ADDRESSING DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES**

Even with the high quality teaching strategies described above, some students will struggle to acquire the knowledge or requisite skills to meet learning goal expectations. Research suggests that using the Response to Intervention (RtI) approach offers teachers a way to identify, assess, and work more effectively with struggling learners. RVCS follows the Response to Intervention three-tiered system of instruction for all students in which there is a greater level of intervention provided depending on where the student falls within the tiers.

Response to Intervention offers a framework that focuses on providing interventions that leverage student strengths and match student needs. Effective RtI models call for the early identification of student

leaning and behavioral needs and provides students with timely support. Interventions are implemented, results are monitored through the collection of student progress data. If progress is made, the student is discharged from the RtI process. If progress is not made, additional, enhanced or more intensive interventions are implemented. Ultimately, if a student shows insufficient progress, the student may be referred for further evaluation.

Response to Intervention models are often represented as a pyramid. Each level of the pyramid represents a tier, or a percentage of students generally found at that level. Tier 1 students are students who are meeting the expectations in the general education classroom without targeted supports. Tier 2 students are not performing at the same level as their peers and are beginning to show skill deficits. Tier 3 students are those who need specialized instruction to make effective progress. It is generally expected that 80% of students in a classroom are in Tier 1, 10-15% are in Tier 2, and approximately 5% are in Tier 3.

The RVCS DCAP primarily targets students in Tier 2 and seeks to do so within the general education classroom.

### **STUDENT STUDY TEAM and the RtI PROCESS**

River Valley has a Student Study Team (SST), led by the Assistant Director, and comprised of the following professionals:

- Classroom teachers
- Special education coordinator
- Literacy interventionist
- School counselor
- School psychologist
- Speech and language pathologist
- School nurse (if appropriate)
- Others as appropriate

The team meets by classroom whenever there is a need to discuss student concerns. After the initial meeting, the team reconvenes within 6-8 weeks. The steps to bring a student to a Student Study Team meeting is described below.

1. Student experiences difficulties, as noted by classroom teachers, OR as indicated by universal screeners. Referrals can also come from faculty/staff observation, MCAS data, kindergarten screening results, etc. All students transferring into RVCS beyond the kindergarten program are also initially included in the SST process.
2. Parent/guardian is informed that the student has been referred to SST.
3. Teacher fills out the SST Form.
4. Vision, hearing, and in-house health screening is conducted if appropriate.
5. Relevant screeners are administered (math, literacy, SAEBRs), if not recently done.

6. Observations/assessments can be conducted by appropriate individuals (speech pathologist, school counselor, literacy interventionist, Assistant Director, special education teachers, school psychologist, OT/PT, etc.) if necessary.
7. Student information is prepared for the SST meeting:
  - The Assistant Director prepares general data (date of birth, family history, attendance, MCAS scores, past progress reports, info from previous teachers, visit to the nurse, etc.)
  - The classroom teacher or the Assistant Director checks in with specialists to determine if the behavior is isolated to the classroom or generalized across all curricular areas.
  - The classroom teacher collects relevant work samples.
8. The SST Team meets to make intervention recommendations. The team agrees on a plan for progress monitoring.
9. Interventions are implemented with fidelity within the general education setting by the general education teachers and assistant teachers unless noted otherwise.
10. The SST reconvenes approximately 6-8 weeks later, with progress monitoring data, observations, etc., to determine success of interventions.
11. If progress is not being made, the team will create enhanced strategies and recommendations and revisit in another 6 weeks.
12. If progress continues not to be made, the team will consider the referral process.

## AVAILABLE SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

A list of general academic and behavioral interventions is listed below. Any, or all of these interventions can be used in the general education classroom setting by the classroom teacher(s).

<b>SAMPLE SUPPORTS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING</b>
Repetition Individualized instruction Multi modal instruction Differentiated instruction Repeat/reteach concepts Explicit teaching of expected behavior Pre-teaching Modeling and teaching learning strategies Partnering the student with students from other levels to reinforce learning Graphic organizers Strategic seating Breakdown assignments into manageable tasks Use of technology Integrated curriculum projects that capitalize on student interests School to home communication logs Workplan adjustments Teach study skills Title 1 support Student/teacher contracts Behavior modification plans Positive incentives/reinforcements Counseling Motor breaks Peer teaching/learning Individualized instruction Small group instruction Access to technology Alternative forms of assessment * See the <i>Behavioral Intervention Manual</i> and the <i>Pre-Referral Intervention Manual</i> for additional academic and behavioral intervention strategies.

<b>HUMAN RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS AVAILABLE WITHIN THE SCHOOL SETTING</b>
Student teachers Literacy interventionist Speech and language pathologist School counselor/school psychologist Specialists teachers/classes School Nurse Librarian Front Office staff Advisor (for MS student) Paraprofessionals Outside agencies (counseling, etc.)

### **Professional Mentoring and Collaboration Opportunities**

River Valley has a formal mentoring and induction program that partners new and new-to-RVCS teachers with teachers who have a minimum of three years' experience at RVCS. Mentors receive training and keep a log of their meetings with their protégés.

The daily schedule of the school is arranged so that all teaching levels have between two and four hours each week available for common planning time during the school day. Additionally, all-staff meetings are held twice each month after school, and two extra hours of faculty planning time are scheduled after school each month. Student support and best practices in pedagogy are frequent topics at these meetings.

Additionally, faculty members support one another to address certain issues with a child. The River Valley faculty is organized into small teams with representation from various teaching levels who set professional practice goals and observe in each other's classrooms to provide feedback on progress toward achieving those goals. In this manner they can offer their perspective of the dynamics of the classroom, teaching strategies, or other contributing factors. This experience strengthens the professional culture in the building and leads to improved supports for diverse learners.

### **Professional Development Opportunities**

The school allocates funds each year to support the professional growth of its staff. This money has been used for staff to pursue advanced degrees, take graduate courses, and enroll in Montessori training courses that focus on the individualized approach to learning that is the basis of the methodology. Professional development funds are regularly used to support staff attendance at a wide variety of professional conferences and workshops, many of which are dedicated to differentiated instruction and meeting the needs of diverse learners. Funds also support in-house programs to strengthen faculty skills in core areas such as teaching literacy.

### **Closing Statements**

River Valley Charter School students benefit from a small community approach to education that strongly binds all constituencies together to provide individualized instruction for all children. Our holistic approach to education honors the learning style, and strengths and challenges of each student, and fosters a supportive approach to learning. Extensive parental involvement, a tested component of a child's success in school, supports the faculty and administration to ensure that the school continues to meet the individual student's needs. Our SST program, low student-to-teacher ratio, support staff and hands-on approach to learning all result in an educational model that allows students to achieve success in the general education setting and avoid unnecessary referrals to special education. Through the RVCS Accountability Plan and requirements of the Annual Report, the school is in a continuous process of assessment that addresses the elements of the River Valley District Accommodation Plan.

*River Valley Charter School complies with all applicable Commonwealth and Federal Law having to do with non-discrimination and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion or creed, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or a foreign language, or prior academic achievement in its educational programs or activities pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 151B and 151C, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; M.G.L. c76,s5, Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Americans with Disabilities Act, and regulations promulgated thereunder, 34 C.F.R. Part 100 (Title VI), Part 106 (Title IX) and Part 104 (Section 504).*