



## Teaching Students with Learning Differences at Aim High

### Background

**IEP stands for Individualized Education Program** and can be thought of as services and accommodations that pre-K thru 12th grade public/charter school students are entitled to by federal law under the Americans with Disability Act. Private schools and summer programs, such as Aim High, are not mandated to offer the same services. However, it is best practice to be aware of the specific learning needs of our students and to make additional efforts as possible.

**504 Plans** are also used to offer accommodations to qualifying students. 504 plans are more commonly used for medical disabilities (including ADHD) that have an impact on student learning.

You are sure to teach **at least one student** this summer who receives special education services during the school year. One in ten students in California have been tested and are eligible for special education (meaning they have an IEP).

### How we address Learning Disabilities at Aim High

- **Aim High uses a full-inclusion model.** This means our classrooms are a combination of students designated as general education, students designated as special education and students designated as gifted and talented.
- There will be students in your class with **undiagnosed learning disabilities and those who have non-traditional learning styles.** Keep this in mind when you have academic or behavioral concerns about a student. Also note that some students might actually **need more challenging tasks and curriculum** to remain engaged in your class.
- Teaching so that you are inclusive of various learning styles, disabilities and differences is challenging but also the most rewarding way to teach. **At Aim High you have the benefit of small classes, flexible curriculum models and team teaching**-- these factors increase your chances of success.
- Each spring, during enrollment, Aim High asks families to send in copies of their child's IEP if they have one. It is not mandatory, thus **we do not have ALL students IEP's on file.** If we do receive a copy, **you will have access to the IEP as well as a "IEP's- at-a-Glance" summary.** The Academic Coach and/or Site Director will coordinate access to these.
- Using special education teaching methods benefits all students. **"Good special education teaching is simply good teaching."** (Anne D'Alonzo, tenured SpEd teacher SFUSD).



## Best Practices for Creating an Inclusive Classroom

- A. **Make sure all students understand what the task/assignment is.** As much as possible, provide oral and visual instructions for students. Repeat instructions and check for understanding.
- B. Do not make assumptions about **reading or reading comprehension skills**. Try not to rely solely on a student's ability to read or write to assess their learning. Can they display mastery another way?
- C. Provide students who have learning differences with **frequent progress checks**. Let them know how well they are progressing toward an individual or class goal.
- D. **Chunk longer assignments/projects into concise and brief tasks** whenever possible.
- E. Offer **specific praise**. Instead of just saying, "You did well," offer comments that link the activity directly with the recognition; for example, "I was particularly pleased by the way in which you organized the rock types on your geology map."
- F. Keep in mind the importance of ongoing **community building**. Strive to create a learning environment in which ALL students feel safe, included and acknowledged for their gifts.
- G. Notice which skills are lagging and teach them. This is part of **scaffolding** that helps make learning accessible to all by offering individual supports they need to "climb up the learning objective." Some will need more scaffolding, and some will need less.
- H. Set up structures and procedures so that students with disabilities (and all students) can rely on **familiar routines in each** class. Most students thrive in an environment that is predictable.
- I. **Be especially mindful of transitions from one task to the next.** Posting an agenda helps with this as well as being very clear about your expectations of students during a transition and having a time-limit.
- J. Work with your team and your students to **keep your classroom and learning materials organized, labeled and well cared for**. This is a helpful practice for those with executive functioning deficits.
- K. **Display Aim High and/or classroom expectations** that you review and refer to as needed. When issues arise, speak to students privately and **focus on the behavior, the expectation and repairing any harm that was done-- not on the student's personal characteristics**.
- L. **Determine classroom signals to quiet down, start working and put materials away.** These might be hand signals, music, visual cues (cue cards, color cards), call and response, or vocalizations.
- M. If you are stuck with how to address a students' academic or behavioral challenges, consider first their strengths and times when they shine. Refer to **Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences**.
- N. **Consult with your teaching team as well as other grade level teachers** about what strategies they are using with key students.
- O. Lean on your **Instructional Coach, Student Support Specialist and Site Directors** for assistance and to clarify which of your students has an **"IEP-at-a-Glance"** on file.