

HARLEM VILLAGE ACADEMIES HIGH – SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS POLICY

The mission of the Harlem Village Academies Network Special Education (SpEd) Department is to support the highest quality core instruction through meaningful assessment, early intervention and individualized programming to meet the needs of students with disabilities ensuring that they reach their fullest potential. We believe that students with disabilities will achieve their fullest potential when they have access to the instruction and community of learners in general education.

As a part of its mission, the teachers, staff, students, and community of Harlem Village Academies High are dedicated to fostering a culturally-responsive environment where students are respected as individuals; where student differences are celebrated and valued.

As a fundamental element of our mission is to help students become responsible, ethical, creative and compassionate members of society, we must ensure that the philosophies and principles of the IB program continue to serve all students – and that access and engagement in learning is increased by identifying and removing barriers to the IB Program at HVAH. Because of this, HVAH is proud to offer an “IB for All” program, allowing students to select – without prior approval – the number of IB classes they wish to take. Note: From a functional standpoint, some classes (like IB Mathematics) do have prior coursework requirements, but all prerequisite classes are based on student choice, and not the teacher selection for placement in an IB cohort.

We are, without question, exceptionally supportive of the diversity of our student population – and of their learning needs.

SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

As a charter school based in New York State (USA), HVAH is guided by both local and national laws that ensure that the policies and procedures in place treat all students equally, and that we support points of access for all students to find success in the IB program.

Special education and related services are provided to children with disabilities who are eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Harlem Village Academy network of schools follows the federal guidelines of providing a variety of services and placement continuum options. Services are provided to students with severe/profound levels of disabilities who are nonverbal and/or are medically fragile; to students with moderate levels of disabilities who may have cognitive deficits or significant behavioral issues; and to students with mild levels of disabilities who may be struggling in one or more academic areas. All types of services and placement settings are determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team with input from the parent and (if possible) the child. Working together as a team (parents and school personnel), we challenge each student based on their individual levels of functioning and performance to be successful in our school, home and community.

Students who have a medically-diagnosed need for a special accommodation or individual educational plan are granted additional support in a variety of ways. In general terms, the network provides services to students in elementary, middle and high school with developmental disabilities.

Teachers are required, by law, to follow the plans and provide accommodations to these students, typically served by what is locally referred to as a “504 Plan” or an “IEP.” These plans allow specific and explicit accommodations to best serve their ability to find success in the classroom. These plans are directly linked to teaching and learning, assessment, and language policies, as they are required to be followed, by law.

Frequently, these special accommodations allow students to seek additional time to complete assignments, preferential seating, the use of a word processor for exams or – in specific cases – the use of an aide throughout the day, paid for by the State or School. These policies are consistent with IB philosophy and practices, and D1 forms are completed to provide accommodations during IB exams, as needed.

SST and ASSESSMENT

The HVAH Student Support Team (SST) is a multidisciplinary team of staff who meet weekly to reflect on the needs of students - both with and without IEPs - who struggle academically and/or socio-emotionally. The team determines what educational or emotional supports might be necessary for individual students to reach success. Specifically, our SST team treats incoming quantitative assessment data (such as the WISC or the New York State English Language Arts and Math assessments) as the starting point for conversations about supporting the needs of our students. When evaluating

qualitative assessment data (such as teacher referrals, classroom observations or parent communication) our SST team works to not lose sight of the student; we use an iterative process to ensure that the supports provided are timely, appropriate, and move the student forward academically.

FACILITIES

The HVAH building and campus is fully accessible to all students and is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and students with physical disabilities are granted key-access to an elevator to help them access all areas of the building.

STAKEHOLDERS

The “IB for All” philosophy, and our focus on inclusion, applies to all members of the HVAH family. No staff or student can be discriminated against because of a disability, and we seek to include all of our students – from all aspects of the educational spectrum – in our daily activities. Because our school culture is defined by CIRCLES values that promote equity, inclusion, and social justice, we insist that all members of HVAH be given access to - and participate in - all classes, assemblies, and sports, to the extent that they wish to participate. Students are made aware of our policies of inclusion upon enrollment, and we model participation during all-school assemblies and in our sports program.

In addition to our student population, our parent population also features adults with accommodation needs. We provide interpreters for parent meetings, as needed, and real-time voice translation for phone calls to parents. Finally, communicating and discussing the needs of this segment of our larger community is a distinct focus of our network’s work.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Harlem Village Academies High, and the Harlem Village Academies Network, comply with FERPA laws, which explicitly govern the confidentiality and dissemination of student data, assessment information, and the special education needs/information of students.

POLICY DOCUMENTATION / POLICY PROCESSES

504 and IEP programs are documented at the network-level, and included in each student’s permanent student file. Each IEP and 504 is reviewed yearly. Special Education policies are primarily governed at the state-level, and our network proactively responds to the individual needs of students as they arrive. As we are governed by federal and state laws, and have been authorized by the SUNY network, we seek to review policies for individual students immediately upon enrollment – or upon the diagnosis that leads to a Special Education assessment and evaluation.