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**Specialized Services Process**

**Step 1: Recognition**

All students begin their educational careers with needs. For many, it is the need for guidance by a professional educator who can expand their knowledge and understanding of the world around them. While each student brings a different level of knowledge and skills to his or her first class, the individual’s needs are typically met by a highly-qualified educator. However, there are children who have unique needs that are atypical for children of their age and may not be within the expertise of the general education classroom teacher. It is during this time that the teacher (or parent, administrator, peer) recognizes a consistent need or challenge exhibited by the student. The recognition of a discrepancy in the student’s academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and/or physical ability and his or her age may signal the need for additional academic or behavioral supports.

During this phase, *it is important to call a meeting with the parents or guardians*. The teacher should provide examples of the student’s work and/or anecdotal classroom notes regarding the student’s needs. In the meeting, the teacher and the parent/guardian should explore the following:

* Is the issue a recurrent problem or new? The parents will be best able to present invaluable insight into the knowledge, skills, and needs of their child. The teacher should document when they recognized an issue.
* Is the issue constant? All children may exhibit unique needs or problems at some point but it may only be an isolated episode for that day. The teacher should document any issue that is constant, providing dates and information about the behavior of concern or skill deficit exhibited by the student.
* Is the issue appropriate for children of this age? How many kindergarten students have been seen crying the first days of school? This behavior is a typical occurrence and should not be confused with an atypical behavior. The teacher should have a strong understanding of the cognitive, behavioral, and physical development levels of typical students they teach.

It is possible that the problems that are being exhibited by the student may be “solved” with the careful execution of a cooperative plan of action between the teacher and the parents. The teacher and the parent should document their plan of action, strategies utilized with the student, and progress. The teacher should continue to collect student work samples and keep assessment data relevant to the student’s unique needs. It is critically important that the teacher document all actions and strategies used in the classroom and the impact on the student.

The student’s *parents/guardians should be kept informed of any changes in the student’s progress*. If the teacher, after a period of time, determines the problem cannot be controlled with simple classroom interventions, then the teacher should notify the parents/guardians that they will be asking for outside help from a school-based pre-referral team.

**Step 2: Pre-referral**

The pre-referral step in the special education process is more formal than providing simple and temporary accommodations for students. Pre-referral intervention is to identify, develop, and implement alternative education strategies for students who have recognized problems in the classroom before the student is referred to special education. The pre-referral team usually consists of the teacher, the parents/guardians, an administrator, other general education teachers, nurse, guidance counselor, and any other adult involved in the education of the student. The general education teacher provides background information regarding the problem exhibited by the student and the team works together to develop possible solutions.

Some of the ways our classrooms work with students who need accommodations include the following:

* Maintain an organized **classroom** and limit distractions.
* Use music and voice inflection.
* Break down instructions into smaller, manageable tasks.
* Use multi-sensory strategies.
* Provide students opportunities for success.

**Step 3: Referral for Special Education Evaluation**

If, after interventions in the general education classroom, the student continues to experience difficulty, Five Stars Academy may request a full psycho-educational exam. Obtaining a fully-qualified exam center can be quite difficult in the Republic of Panama and so we will sometimes request a trip to the U.S. or Canada.

**Step 4: IEP Meeting and Implementation**

The Individualized Education Program a discussion between the Five Stars Academy and the parents that discusses the special education services to be provided by Five Stars Academy. Five Stars Academy will review with the parents the psycho-educational testing information. With the parents, we will provide a list of services we are able to offer and provide recommendations for resources where FSA is not able to assist. FSA along with the parents will set up periodic meetings throughout the year to discuss progress and challenges.

**Step 5: Reevaluation**

Each year, Five Stars Academy and the parents will meet for the dual purpose of evaluating the implementation of the current IEP and to develop the next annual IEP. During these meetings and based on new assessment data, Five Stars Academy will better be able to determine the course of action for the following year.

There are times when, after the reevaluation takes place, it is determined that the student does not need special education services. One example of this might be young children who are provided speech and language services and have developed the ability to speak without problems. In this case, Five Stars Academy and the parents will come to an agreement that the student no longer is in need of continued services.