



Special Education Handbook - 2024-2025

Thank you for choosing Excel Academy Charter School (“EACS”) to support you on your student’s educational journey. We recognize the unique challenges that you may encounter while supporting your student with special needs in an independent study learning model and want to ensure that you have a reference guide to provide important information about the Special Education department at Excel Academy Charter School.

Excel Academy’s special education department is staffed with a collaborative team of credentialed special education teachers, specialists, and administrators who each bring a wealth of experience serving and supporting students with special needs to our school. We look forward to working with your student(s) to provide their Individualized Education Plan (“IEP”) supports and services in our personalized learning environment.

If your student is newly enrolled, we are pleased to welcome you to the Excel Academy family! If your student is continuing with us, we hope you will find this handbook helpful as a reference guide for a variety of topics and frequently asked questions.

I am honored to have the privilege of supporting this team as we embark on another year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Lara Ulmer'.

Lara Ulmer
Director of Special Education

To view the general Excel Academy Charter School handbook on our website, please [click here](#).

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Special Education Department Contacts

Parent Support

Parent support is available during school hours, Monday through Friday from 8:00 A.M.–4:30 P.M. Please see the information below for special education department contact information.

Mailing Address

Our office is located at:

1 Technology Drive, Ste I-811
Irvine, CA 92618

For all questions, please **first** contact your student's **assigned Case Manager (“CM”)** for support. You will receive contact information for your student's CM prior to the first day of school. If you wish to reach a different staff member by email, please use one of the contacts below.

Student Records Requests:

Loubna Shokair, Registrar - registrar@excelacademy.education

Newly Enrolled/Transfer Students:

Lara Ulmer, Director of Special Education - lulmer@excelacademy.education

Case Manager and IEP Service Provider Questions:

Leah Vides, Assistant Director of Special Education - lvides@excelacademy.education

IEP Questions or Concerns:

Angela Garbe, Program Specialist - agarbe@excelacademy.education

General Special Education Referral Questions:

Noell Scott, School Psychologist - nscott@excelacademy.education

Speech and Language Therapy Referral Questions:

Lisa Villarreal, Speech and Language Pathologist - lvillarreal@excelacademy.education

If you wish to reach a specific team member by phone, please use one of the following:

Excel Academy Main Office	PH: 949-387-7822
Records/Registrar - Loubna Shokair	PH: 714-387-9677
Program Specialist - Angela Garbe	PH: 760-898-5155
Assistant Director of Special Education - Leah Vides	PH: 626-863-8950
Director of Special Education - Lara Ulmer	PH: 949-378-1350

Please refer to the general EACS Handbook for additional staff contact information

Contact Information and Communication Policy

School Communication Responsibilities

It is imperative that we are able to communicate effectively with our families due to the remote nature of our school. The school requires that all parents reply to communication from Excel Academy staff and Teachers of Records within 48 hours (2 business days). We also require 24 hours notice in the event a parent must cancel an Excel Academy appointment, including but not limited to: LP meetings, IEPs, SPED provider appointments, and Student Success Team (SST) meetings.



Communications with the Special Education Team

The main venues of communication and document submission to parents of special education students are Email and DocuSign. Parents will receive time-sensitive communication, information about upcoming events, reminders, surveys, and IEP-related documents via both of these methods.

DocuSign is a secure means for the electronic delivery of documents and the gathering of formal signatures. It is not required that you have a personal DocuSign account in order to access, view, and provide signatures on documents sent to you. In addition, you may request that a physical copy of any document be forwarded via US Mail or email attachment. Whenever you receive a confidential document via DocuSign, the passcode will be your student's SIX digit

birthday in MMDDYY format. For example, if your student's birthday is 3/2/13, the passcode will be 030212. ***Please let your student's Case Manager know as soon as possible if you would like to update your email contact information.***



Enrollment

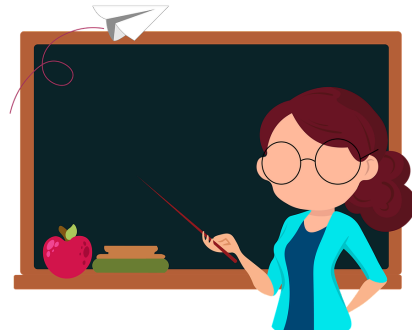
Students newly enrolled in Excel Academy Charter School (“EACS”) with an active IEP will be supported during each step of the transition. Once the admissions process is complete, your student will be assigned to a Teacher of Record (“ToR”), who will walk you through the details of the Master Agreement (“MA”) as well as the Acknowledgement of Responsibilities (“AoR”). The MA is a binding agreement between Excel Academy, the student, the parent/guardian, the supervising ToR, and other responsible persons. The agreement documents assigned courses as well as the time, manner, and frequency of the student’s meetings with the faculty. The AoR further outlines terms and conditions of Independent Study responsibilities.



Once both the MA and the AoR have been signed, your student is considered fully enrolled in EACS. Our special education team will support the process of requesting, gathering, and reviewing your student’s records prior to sending a welcome letter via email describing next steps. Once you have received your student’s welcome letter, please contact Lara Ulmer, Director of Special Education via email at lulmer@excelacademy.education if you have any questions.

The Excel Academy IEP Team

Teacher of Record (ToR) - The ToR is a single or multiple subject credential-holding teacher who works with assigned families to identify, support, and implement a personalized learning plan for each student. The assigned ToR will serve as the General Education teacher in all IEP meetings.



Parent/Guardian - Parents and guardians are considered vital participants in any IEP team discussion. In addition, at Excel Academy, our personalized independent study model requires that a parent/guardian or adult designee be responsible for providing daily core instructional support to students in the home setting.

Student - EACS encourages students to participate in discussion with their IEP team at all meetings, as soon as it is legally and/or developmentally appropriate for them to do so. Student's ages 16 and up will be invited to participate by their CM as an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) becomes a legally mandated portion of the IEP at age 16. Students 18 and up are required to participate, unless EACS has documentation to show continuing parent rights past the age of majority.





Case Manager (CM) - The CM is a fully credentialed special education teacher/education specialist. Your student's CM will provide oversight of all IEP implementation and progress monitoring needs, and in most cases will serve as the direct provider of Specialized Academic Instruction ("SAI") service.

Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) -

The SLP is an educational specialist trained in the prevention, assessment and treatment of speech and language disorders. If your student is identified as a special education student with only speech needs, an SLP will serve as your student's CM. For students with more complex needs including speech, the SLP will serve as a related service provider.



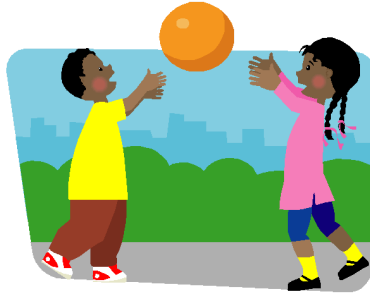
School Psychologist - The School Psychologist is an educational specialist trained in both the psychological and educational disciplines. At EACS, our School Psychologists support the IEP team in completing comprehensive evaluations of students across the domains of general development, cognition, processing, motor skills, academic achievement, adaptive/self-help skills, social-emotional skills. Additionally, they may provide ongoing direct services per the IEP. If your student is due for a comprehensive special education evaluation, or is receiving direct services for social/emotional needs, a School Psychologist will be part of your student's IEP team.

Related Service Providers - Related service providers support the provision of a variety of additional support services that may be provided per your student’s IEP. They are referred to as “related services” because they are intended to address needs related to a primary educational disability condition. Some of the more common related service areas are Occupational Therapy (“OT”), Adapted Physical Education (“APE”), Physical Therapy (“PT”). If your student receives consultation or direct service in any of these areas per their current IEP, or is suspected of having a need for related services, a specialist will be contracted to provide assessment, consultation and/or direct service.



Administrative Designee/LEA Rep -

An administrative designee is required to participate in all IEP meetings. The primary purpose of the LEA Rep is to support the IEP team in collaborative discussion. Additionally, they are tasked with ensuring that our IEP team meeting processes remain both student-centered and legally compliant.



IEP Services

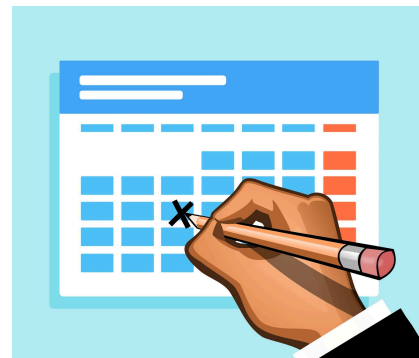
IEP Team Assignments

Prior to the first day of the regular school year, you will receive a personalized contact from your student's assigned Case Manager and all related service providers to discuss a schedule of service provision. Your student's IEP team will be selected and matched to your student(s) based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to credential/license type and geographic location. We have worked to expand our in-house faculty and currently employ a full team of Case Managers, Speech and Language Pathologists, SLP Assistant, School Psychologists, an Occupational Therapist and support staff to meet your student's needs.

Due to the complex nature of matching IEP teams to hundreds of students across several counties, the EACS team is not able to consider requests for specific CMs, providers, or related service agencies.

Scheduling IEP Services

When contacted by your student's service providers you will discuss available appointment times that allow for implementation of your student's IEP according to the frequency, duration, and delivery method required. Please note that services may only be provided during regular school hours (8:00 am through 4:30 pm).



“

Virtual Services:

All virtually delivered IEP services (individual or group) will be provided via Zoom or a similar online platform. Your CM, SLP, or related provider will provide specific information for platform access.

Virtual Session Participation:

Although the independent study setting offers scheduling flexibility for students to participate in many outside activities, it is important to remember that IEP services are deemed necessary in order for your student to receive educational benefit. With this in mind, when students are participating in any virtual special education service, the expectation is that they will be at home or in a quiet seated work area where they can remain fully engaged with the instructor for the duration of the session. It is not appropriate for students to join virtual sessions while laying in bed or in any location where they are not able to respond to the instructor when asked through a variety of formats (e.g. on-screen chat, written responses).

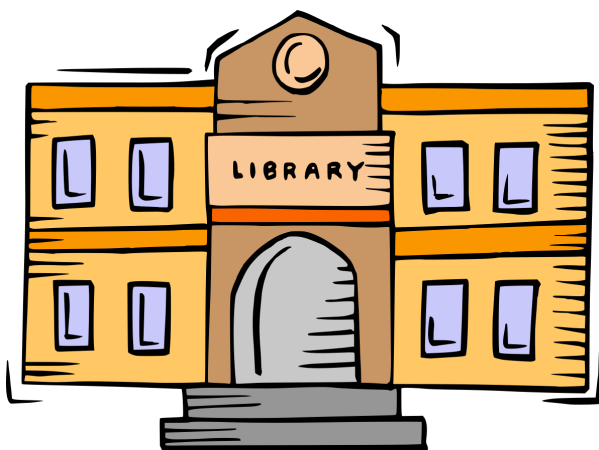
Please consider your student’s schedule of virtual services before making commitments to activities that may pose a scheduling conflict or cause your student to be away from an appropriate academic work area when their sessions begin. In addition, EACS requires that students’ web cameras are on and that the student is visible in the camera frame during the entirety of each virtual session. If you have any concerns with this, please contact your student’s case manager to discuss.

Some of our students may require extra support from a parent during individual virtual sessions to help them adjust to the format. If the parent and CM agree that this is the case, the CM and parent must develop a fade out plan to increase the student’s ability to independently participate in sessions.

Due to the confidentiality requirements of special education, parents are prohibited from joining a group session without first identifying themselves. We kindly ask that parents refrain from participating, in any way, in a group session without prior permission from the CM or group instructor. Please note that services may only be provided during regular school hours (8:00 am through 4:30 pm).

In Person Services:

All in-person services will be provided in a public location deemed to be an appropriate environment for the purpose of providing the indicated service. Due to our independent study charter school guidelines, we are not permitted to meet your student for any activity in our physical office location. Please note that services may only be provided during regular school hours (8:00 am through 4:30 pm).



Public Meeting Locations

If your student's IEP calls for in-person service delivery, the service provider will identify appropriate locations to meet with your student within a 25 mile radius of your home address. The provider will contact you to discuss options and agree on a location prior to the first day of service.

Preferred locations for in-person services are public libraries and community centers, although public food establishments and public parks will also be considered. If your student is working with a vendored provider for OT, PT, APE, or another service; you may be required to travel to a clinic/office location to meet your provider.

In Person Participation Guidelines

When students meet EACS providers for in-person sessions, a parent or guardian is required to remain on the premises or within a five minute travel radius of the location. If you choose to leave the premises during your student's session, you must provide your cell phone number to the service provider. If your student experiences a health-related or behavior-related emergency during sessions, it is vital that you are close enough to return to the session location without delay. If an EACS staff member is not able to reach you in the event of a health-related emergency, they will be required to dial 911 for assistance. If your student has a documented medical condition potentially requiring the administration of emergency medications (e.g. Albuterol, Diastat, etc), a parent or caregiver designated by the parent must remain in the immediate proximity of the student for the duration of the in-person session to provide support if needed. Excel Academy employees and contracted support staff are not permitted to provide emergency medications to students .

Prioritizing IEP Services

We understand that in today's world our students have very busy schedules. We also understand that the EACS format allows for them to fill their day with all manner of enriching activities to supplement their formal educational journey. However, we ask that when committing to educational and extracurricular activities you consider the importance of your student's IEP services. Because each IEP service provider is tasked with setting up session schedules to accommodate both individual and group services for students, we ask that you maintain

scheduling flexibility with your student's IEP providers as you work together to determine a mutually agreeable session schedule.

If you are unable to agree to a mutually agreeable schedule and/or location for the delivery of individual special education services, such that your student's IEP is unable to be implemented, EACS will be required to select and notify you of your student's scheduled service time and location. If you choose not to make your student available during the designated service time, please be aware that they will not be entitled to make-up services and EACS may be required to issue a Progress Improvement Notification due to lack of participation/attendance.

All IEP services delivered in a group setting will be pre-scheduled by EACS and are not able to be modified.

If there is a delay on the part of EACS in assigning your student's IEP service providers, make-up sessions will be provided per the IEP for the duration of time that services were unavailable.



Cancellations/Reschedules/No-Shows

We understand that sometimes unforeseen circumstances present themselves. If you need to cancel your student's IEP service appointment due to a conflicting educational or personal activity scheduled during the same period of time, we ask that you please do so at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled appointment. If you need to cancel your student's IEP service due to illness, please notify the provider as soon as you are aware that your student will not be well enough to participate. Parent or student canceled sessions and no-shows will be considered an absence and will not be made-up. Requests to reschedule sessions cannot be accommodated due to staff bandwidth and capacity. If a student demonstrates a pattern of cancellations or no-shows for services, your CM will reach out to determine a plan for increased successful attendance. If the absences continue, you will be contacted by the EACS special education program specialist to discuss. If neither attempt results in improved attendance, Progress Improvement Notifications ("PINs") may be issued per the [EACS SPED Student PIN Policy](#).

Special Education sessions may be cancelled in the event of a required staff activity or an unexpected staff illness. You will be notified in writing via email in these circumstances. If you wish to request a make-up

session due to a staff-related cancellation, EACS kindly requests that you email the Assistant Director of Special Education, Leah Vides, at lvides@excelacademy.education no later than one calendar week following the cancellation to document your request. All session make-ups will be provided during the EACS summer session.



CM/ToR Collaboration

Learning Period (LP) Meetings

Learning Period (LP) meetings are a critical part of personalized learning at Excel Academy. The LP meeting takes place at a mutually agreed upon public location, approximately every 20 school days. During the meeting, the ToR communicates with the student one on one to gather information and knowledge learned throughout the LP. If your student is participating in the Virtual Elementary path, their ToR will maintain ongoing documentation of core content presentation in place of the LP meeting requirement.

While it is not required, we encourage you to please share work samples with your student's CM monthly as well. If work samples are not provided regularly throughout the year, your student's CM will request recent samples from your student's ToR, along with general information regarding their observations of academic progress, prior to any scheduled IEP meeting.



Body of Work

A body of work is 20 days worth of learning, in each assigned subject area, generated from the ToR-provided Pacing Guide for each core subject/course. All work should be graded or evaluated in some manner. At each LP meeting, the ToR will collect a sampling from the body of work in each subject/course that is an accurate representation of the work completed. The ToR will file these samples as proof of student daily engagement, attendance and progress.

When scheduling LP meetings with the ToR, please keep in mind your student's Excel provided services. Missed service sessions due to LP meetings will not be made up.

Please note that your student's IEP service providers are required to provide specially designed instruction in accordance with their current documented IEP goals and objectives. Because of this, they are not able to support student completion of work samples for the sole purpose of meeting LP body of work requirements.

Student Pacing and Curriculum

The ToR will provide a pacing guide for all curriculum content in a student's Course of Study before each LP begins. The student's assigned ToR will review the body of work completed by the student throughout the LP and engage in academic conversation to confirm content mastery. Progression through the assigned curriculum content will be verified by the ToR on a weekly basis. If students fail to complete at least 70% of the pacing guide provided by the ToR, they may be issued a PIN.

The ToR, CM, and Special Education Coordinator will collaborate on pacing for students receiving support via an IEP, as needed and requested by the ToR and/or parent. In addition, if a student requires exposure to both a core grade-level curriculum and a supplemental curriculum in order to address their unique needs, consultation will be provided to support appropriate selection, pacing and assessment of progress. If a student is entirely unable to access core grade-level curriculum due to their disability, the IEP team will meet to discuss and determine an appropriate instructional level, and will discuss the long-term considerations of moving a student to an exclusively alternate curriculum.

Special Education Attendance

Consistent attendance for all IEP services is essential to ensuring that each student makes adequate progress and is receiving appropriate ongoing support for their disability-related educational needs. If your family is experiencing a special circumstance that will prevent your student from attending their IEP services consistently, you are encouraged to notify your student's CM as soon as possible. When a student accumulates three cancellations or no-shows for services, your CM will reach out to determine a plan for increased successful attendance. If the absences continue, you will be contacted by the EACS special education program specialist to discuss the concern. If neither attempt results in improved student attendance, Progress Improvement Notifications ("PINs") will be issued per the [EACS SPED Student PIN Policy](#).



General Education Attendance

Along with the assessment of student work, another responsibility of the ToR is to verify and claim attendance monthly. Daily engagement will be assessed each school day. Attendance will be claimed on or after the last day of the Learning Period. After reviewing daily engagement and the student's work, the ToR will verify that ample work was completed by the student from the provided pacing guide for the LP, and the ToR and parent/guardian will sign and date the electronic Attendance Grid Log. *Please note that attendance for IEP services is documented and monitored separately, and does not replace LP attendance requirements. Attendance for students participating in the Virtual Elementary Path will be supported by the ToR.*



Special Education Assessment

Special Education is defined by law as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of the child with a disability.” In order to determine a student's unique needs and discuss their eligibility for special education, assessment in the areas of suspected disability are required. Once all assessments are complete, the IEP team meets to discuss results, review student progress, and answer the following questions.

1. Does the student meet the State of California’s definition for eligibility criteria as an individual with a disability?
2. Does the severity of the disability have an adverse effect on the student’s educational performance?
3. Does the student require special education services to ensure a free appropriate public education?

There are times when an assessment is required, and times when it will be recommended.

Required Assessment Decision Points:

1. Initial referral for special education.
2. Once every three years following the initial (AKA Reevaluation).
3. Anytime a new or additional disability is suspected by any member of the IEP team.

Recommended Assessment Decision Points:

1. Significant change in progress, disability status, or age since last evaluation.
2. Recommended exit from special education service.
3. Lack of consensus among the IEP team regarding the student's disability condition, unique needs, or offer of FAPE.

If your student is due for a required assessment, you will be provided with an Assessment Plan (AP) at least 60 days prior to the date on which the IEP team will be required to convene and discuss results.

If your student is recommended for an additional assessment, an early Reevaluation, or a special education assessment for any other reason, an AP will be provided within 15 calendar days of the referral concern being raised.

Once your consent to the AP is received, you will be contacted by the assigned assessment team to begin scheduling assessment contacts. We kindly request your cooperation and flexibility in accommodating the assessment team as your student may encounter multiple assessors and testing sessions. Following completion of the assessments, an IEP team meeting will be scheduled to review results and discuss recommendations. If you do not choose to provide consent to a required or recommended assessment, a representative from the EACS special education administrative team will contact you to discuss your concerns.

Observation of Student Educational Activities

EACS staff may observe any enrolled student while engaged in educational activities, with or without prior notice. While this is permitted to occur for any reason deemed appropriate and necessary by EACS administration, the primary functions of observation are to ensure that EACS is providing adequate support to students learning in our Independent Study Charter School environment, as well as to provide support and evaluative feedback to staff. Observations may occur during any Excel sponsored, funded, or supervised activity including but not limited to virtual meetings, online courses, in-person meetings, enrichment activities, extracurricular activities, and field trips.

Special education staff may observe your student participating in their educational day for the purposes of consultative/instructional support to colleagues, staff evaluation purposes, and to provide oversight to the special education team in the delivery and implementation of the special education program. When observations are required to be completed by internal staff to ensure compliance with state and/or licensing board requirements regarding oversight of service providers, student sessions may be canceled in advance to allow for these observations to occur as required.

If the purpose is to complete a structured or unstructured student observation as a portion of formal multidisciplinary evaluation, you will have provided prior permission via an active Assessment Plan (AP).



Individualized Education Plan (“IEP”) Information

IEP Overview

The term “individualized education program” (IEP) refers to a written document, developed for each child with a disability, to include:

1. Student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, including how the disability affects involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.
2. A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to enable the student to make progress in the general education curriculum; and to meet other educational needs that result from the disability.
3. A description of how the student’s progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured, and when.
4. A statement of the special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services that will be provided to appropriately support the student in making progress toward the annual goals.
5. An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with typically developing peers in the regular class and extracurricular and nonacademic activities.
6. A statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to support access and formally measure academic achievement and functional performance.

IEP Meeting Scheduling and Participation

The following team members are required to participate in all IEP meetings:

- Parent/Guardian or Designee
- Teacher of Record
- Case Manager
- LEA Rep

*Additional IEP team members may be



invited, depending on the purpose and agenda of the scheduled meeting.

Parents/guardians will be contacted at minimum 10 days prior to any proposed IEP meeting date to discuss availability. If no response is received, a written meeting invitation will be provided to reflect the proposed meeting date and time. If you would like to designate another family member or friend to represent you as the parent/guardian at your student's IEP meetings, please submit your request in writing to your student's CM.

If EACS does not receive a response from a parent/guardian when proposing a required IEP meeting, three attempts will be made to engage parents/guardians in the scheduling process. If those attempts are unsuccessful and no response is received, an IEP date will be determined based on the availability of the remaining team members, and the IEP will be held without parent/guardian participation.

All EACS IEP meetings are held via the online platform Zoom, which provides both telephonic and videoconference access. Prior to the meeting all participants will be provided with a unique, secure access link.

IEP Plan Review Meetings

Each student's IEP is required to be reviewed at least once annually. The primary purpose is to discuss progress toward achievement of annual goals, and to update and revise the IEP appropriately. In addition, the IEP team will meet whenever the parent or another IEP team member requests a meeting to discuss, review or revise the IEP. An IEP meeting will be held within 30 calendar days of receipt of a written or verbal request from a parent.

Changes, Corrections and Amendments

If making changes to a child's IEP after the Plan Review IEP Team meeting for a school year has already occurred, the parent and LEA rep may agree not to convene a full IEP team meeting and instead may develop an amendment to correct or modify the student's existing IEP without a formal team discussion. While this is legally permitted with parent consent, it is recommended that it only be used for minor corrections and changes. The majority of concerns will necessitate the participation of all required IEP team members.

IEP Meeting Guests

Parents/guardians are permitted to invite anyone of their choosing to participate in their student's IEP. However, we at EACS kindly request that you notify your student's CM of any additional attendees prior to the IEP date. If EACS does not receive prior notification of an additional guest, the meeting will proceed so long as the guest participates in discussion in a collaborative and respectful manner, as described below in *IEP Participation Norms and the*

EACS Civility Policy.

If the guest is not able or willing to participate appropriately and the parent/guardian insists on their participation, the LEA representative may choose to end the meeting and reschedule for a time when additional administrative support can be provided.

IEP Meeting Participation Norms



1. Allow each other to talk without interruption. If needed, write questions or comments down and present them when the person is finished speaking.



2. Treat each other with respect. Voice levels will be kept down, profanity will not be used, narration will be kept to a minimum and everyone will remain engaged until the meeting is over. Generalized statements such as “You never...” “He always...” “No one cares about...” etc. will be avoided.



3. Summarize assessment results in 15 minutes or less.



4. Listen to understand each other’s viewpoint. Frame responses as a question and do not assume you know the answer. You may not agree with the person speaking and that is your right. Everyone is entitled to their personal view.



5. Focus on the future whenever possible rather than returning to past difficulties.



6. Anyone may call a private meeting (caucus); just ask for one.



7. The meeting is confidential.

8. Agree to time constraints.

Additionally, please be aware all activities occurring while in contact with Excel Academy staff are bound by the EACS Civility Policy. In the event that any party is uncivil during a school-related activity, the following steps will occur:

1. Communicate - The party experiencing the uncivil behavior will communicate that the behavior is not civil and uncivil behavior must cease immediately.
2. End Activity/Meeting - If the uncivil party fails to correct the uncivil behavior as directed, the affected party shall end the activity/meeting.
3. Referral - The reporting party shall refer the situation to the school administration with a written summary of the uncivil behavior and how he/she responded.

4. Determination - If it is determined that uncivil behavior occurred, proper disciplinary action will be taken, which may include suspension or expulsion.

Sample Plan Review IEP Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions, Purpose of Meeting, Establish Time Constraints
2. Procedural Safeguards
3. Student Strengths and Parent Concerns
4. Goal Progress Review
5. Special Factors
6. Proposal of New Goals
7. Accommodations and Modifications
8. Statewide Assessments
9. Services
10. Transportation
11. Extended School Year
12. Placement and LRE
13. Emergency Circumstances Plan
14. Offer of FAPE



Understanding FAPE

The acronym “FAPE” stands for Free and Appropriate Public Education. All students enrolled in EACS are enrolled in a public charter school, thereby ensuring access to three portions of this standard - *Free, Public, Education*.

The “A” in FAPE, stands for “Appropriate” and is determined via the IEP process. The FAPE standard mandates that every student identified as eligible for special education receive an education that includes specialized instruction to meet their unique needs. The formal written offer of FAPE is usually the final discussion item in the IEP agenda, and outlines the specific services and supports deemed necessary to provide the student with a FAPE.

IEP Consent

Following each IEP meeting, you will receive a full copy of the final IEP document via DocuSign. *The EACS team asks that you please review and provide a response to your student’s IEP*

within 15 calendar days. If you have any questions regarding the content of your student's IEP document and would like to discuss it further before providing a response, please contact your student's CM. Each IEP signature page will reflect options to agree in full, or to agree with exceptions. If no response is received within 15 days of the first DocuSign delivery, the EACS special education program specialist will follow up with you to discuss your options for providing consent

It is important to note that without parent consent, we are unable to implement any changes to the IEP, including any changes to your student's services or accommodations.

Independent Study and Special Education

EACS offers independent study to meet the personalized educational needs and goals of all enrolled students. For students with identified special education needs, the IEP then provides an additional layer of individualization. It is important to note that Independent Study is an alternative education program designed to teach the knowledge and skills of the core curriculum, and is considered to be a uniquely non-restrictive placement within the special education continuum. Independent study placement cannot be unilaterally determined by a parent or LEA, it must be an IEP team decision.

As part of the required agenda topics for each IEP meeting, the student's team will review progress, discuss ongoing needs, and will determine an offer of FAPE in the LRE. If the needs of the student can continue to be met in the Independent Study setting, it will remain the recommended LRE. However, if the student is determined to require a more restrictive placement in order to make progress, the IEP team is obligated to make an offer of FAPE to include a placement in the LRE that is appropriate for the individual student.



Curriculum and Materials

California State & Grade-Level Standards

Excel Academy students must show progression towards, and mastery of, California State Content Standards in order to remain enrolled. With the help of an assigned ToR, students will be guided towards the completion of these standards. ToRs will monitor and adjust student progress through the curriculum regularly to ensure completion of the grade-level standards .

ToRs will provide a copy of the grade-level content standards for all students enrolled. Additionally, parents can obtain the subject and course standards directly from the [California Department of Education](#) website.

Criteria for Materials That Can Be Purchased with Instructional Funds (IFs)

Excel Academy receives funding from the state to support student learning and progress toward the standards. Therefore, IFs need to be spent on educational items that meet the criteria below. ToRs will consult with the Student Services Manager for additional clarification on acceptable IF purchases. The list below should not be considered as all-inclusive and Excel Academy reserves the right to the interpretation of the below criteria and to exercise final judgment on how IFs will be used.

General Criteria:

- Educational curriculum ordered is appropriate for the student's courses and learning plan.
- Materials must be used to meet state and school standards for the student for whom the materials are being purchased.

Additional Guidelines for Special Education

Students who are receiving the support of special education are likewise expected to show progression toward grade-level standards, unless the IEP team has agreed that an alternate curriculum is required due to the unique nature or severity of the student's disability condition.

Unless an alternate curriculum determination has been made and documented by the IEP team, all EACS students must first select an appropriate foundational core curriculum to address all standard subject requirements at their enrolled grade level. Once that selection has been made, it is appropriate and permitted to select an additional supplemental curriculum to support scaffolding between the student's instructional level and currently enrolled grade level. If you require support in selecting an appropriate core curriculum at your student's grade level, or a supplemental curriculum, you are encouraged to collaborate with their assigned ToR and CM for recommendations.



Intervention

WIN

The What I Need (WIN) Program provides quality instruction & progress monitoring to a particular group of students who are performing below grade-level standards. Students are placed in the WIN program based on i-Ready data and ToR proctored assessments. Excel believes it is imperative to ensure each student is performing up to their full potential. Additionally, the state of California requires every public school to have a *Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)* in place to help students reach state standards. (Link provided: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/>)

It is important to note that ALL parts of the WIN program are required per the Acknowledgment of Responsibilities signed with the 2023/2024 Master Agreement. If students or parents do not participate in the WIN Program, they may receive a Progress Improvement Notification (PIN).

It is important to note that EACS students receiving special education are not exempt from WIN requirements. WIN is intended to provide Tier 2 academic support and intervention, and Special Education is intended to provide Tier 3 support via specialized academic instruction (SAI). These two levels of support build on each other; one does not automatically replace the other. However, it is recommended and encouraged that any concerns regarding a special education student's participation in the WIN program be brought to the IEP team for discussion and consideration.



State and Local Assessments

i-Ready Benchmark Assessments

i-Ready benchmark assessments are adaptive diagnostic tests that will indicate mastery and identify learning gaps for students in grades K-11. The benchmark assessments will be administered at least twice annually within the set testing windows. There is no law permitting a parent to opt out of the school's internal assessments, and therefore, students are required to participate in all internal assessments. However, any applicable accommodations will be provided per the student's IEP.

Statewide Standardized Testing

All students identified as requiring special education are expected to participate in standardized state and local assessments along with their nondisabled peers. The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress ("CAASPP") is the state-mandated academic testing program. The California Alternate Assessment ("CAA") is available to students with significant disabilities preventing access to the CAASPP. All charter schools are required to administer the CAASPP and CAA to identified students, as well as other state-mandated assessments.

In California, parents may opt out of state mandated academic testing by submitting a written request to the school each year. *We do not recommend opting out.* Again, please note that this applies only to state mandated assessments and will not excuse your student from participating in EACS' required internal progress monitoring activities such as iReady assessments, described above.

Your student's IEP includes a section wherein any permitted accommodations will be reflected to support your student's access to standardized state testing activities. If your student's IEP reflects highly individualized accommodations requiring one-on-one administration, their participation will be supported by a designated member of the special education team. If you have concerns about your student's ability to access statewide standardized testing, you are encouraged to discuss your concerns with the IEP team.

If your student requires one-on-one testing, you will receive communications from the special education department prior to the testing window regarding the specifics of planning for your

student's participation. The testing window typically takes place during the last 6-7 weeks of the school year, in April and May. We strongly encourage you to consider this timing when making plans for out-of-state travel with your student. If your student is required to test in-person due to their IEP accommodations, you will be provided with a minimum of two weeks notice regarding test locations and appointment times. During the statewide testing window, some of your student's regularly scheduled service sessions may be rescheduled and/or canceled to allow for internal special education staff to support student participation.

If you have any general questions about the EACS statewide testing requirement, please refer to pages 77-79 of the EACS 2024-2025 Manual.

Student Testing Participation Requirement

All students currently enrolled in Excel Academy are required to participate in the aforementioned tests (where applicable). Failure to participate or satisfy the above requirement will result in PINs being issued to the student. Please refer to Excel Academy's [Special Education Student PIN Policy](#) for more information.

Report Cards and IEP Progress Reports

Students in grades TK- 12 will receive report cards to document progress and growth following the end of each semester with Excel Academy. The grades administered on the report card are final as determined by the ToR and the administration.

IEP Progress reports will also be provided biannually, during the same timeframe in which semester-end report cards are completed. Your student will receive a detailed progress report for each individual goal addressed by the last agreed upon IEP.

In addition, your student will receive updated progress reports at each annual IEP review meeting. The data shown on each progress report provided at the semester's end will reflect progress from the point of the last IEP revision to the end of the semester. For the most comprehensive picture of your student's IEP progress over the course of one full IEP implementation year, please refer to the annual progress report provided within the annual IEP review.



High School

Graduation Requirements

Students are eligible to earn a regular high school diploma when all requirements below have been met:

1. English - 40 credits
2. Math - 20 credits
3. Science - 20 credits (1 life/1 physical)
4. History - 30 credits (1 US/ 1 world/gov/econ)
5. VAPA/World Language/CTE - 10 credits
6. PE - 20 credits
7. Ethnic Studies - 5 credits
8. Electives - 75 credits

Total to graduate: 220 credits

*5 credits = 1 semester / 10 credits = 1 year

Certificate of Completion (“COC”) Requirements



Not all students in California public schools are able to meet traditional graduation requirements. California public school students with significant disability conditions have the option to pursue a non-diploma track that will earn an alternative form of certification permitting that will permit participation in graduation and graduation related activities. Students with identified unique needs related to a disability condition are eligible for an alternate High School completion option, per their active Individualized Education Plan (“IEP”).

Given that the aforementioned is based on an IEP team recommendation, the IEP team will meet to discuss high school completion options and determine the appropriate path for any student identified with a significant cognitive disability. This IEP meeting may occur as early as the

spring semester of the student's 8th grade year but will be held no later than the first semester of enrollment in 9th grade coursework. The student's progress toward COC requirements will then be revisited at each IEP meeting to follow. If it is determined by the IEP team that the appropriate High School completion path is a Certificate of Completion ("COC"), the student will be required to meet the following requirements:

1. Three years/six semesters of English Language Arts.
2. Two years/four semesters of mathematics.
3. Two years/four semesters of science, including one year each of life biological and physical sciences.
4. Two years/four semesters of social studies.
5. Two years/four semesters in physical education, unless the pupil has been exempted pursuant to the provisions of Ed Code Section 51241.
6. Two and a half years/five semesters of Employment, Education, and Life Skills. Five credits (one semester minimum) required in each category.

Total to earned COC: 135 credits

For more information, please refer to the [EACS COC Policy](#).

Individual Transition Plan ("ITP") and Transition Services

An ITP is required to be developed for each student with special needs, beginning no later than the first IEP expected to be in effect when the student turns 16. This portion of the IEP will contain

1. Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills. These recommended goals will be based upon age appropriate transition assessments.

and

2. Recommended transition services needed to assist the child in reaching postsecondary goals.

Federal law requires schools to provide disabled students with specialized supports from age 3 until age 22, or until they graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma. Students who receive a COC may decide to return to high school and can do so through the age of 22. There are three events that end the school's responsibility to a student with a disability.

1. Student earns a regular high school diploma.
2. Student turns 22.
3. Student or parent/guardian (in the case of conserved adults) requests revocation of all special education and related services.



Graduation

All special education students who are working toward earning a regular high school diploma will receive a Prior Written Notice (“PWN”) no more than 30 days prior to their anticipated graduation date. The PWN will confirm the forthcoming completion of diploma requirements, and will provide specific information regarding the end of special education services due to graduation. Following graduation, a Summary of Progress (“SOP”) and copies of all recent IEP documentation will be provided to the parent/guardian and/or adult student along with their final IEP progress report.

Student/Parent Requests for Revocation of Special Education

Parents and non-conserved students of majority age have the right to entirely revoke the provision of special education and related services at any time, without reason, following notification in writing. While we ask that you please put such a request in writing, EACS will accept verbal revocation requests made to any staff member, and will follow-up in writing to confirm informed consent to the revocation.

Parents and non-conserved students of majority age also have the right to revoke specific services. In these cases, an IEP will be scheduled to discuss the ramifications of the request.

Once a student or parent has revoked permission to implement the IEP, the student is immediately considered a general education student. If new concerns arise following a revocation decision, the special education referral process may be initiated again by the student, parent, or any staff member without delay.



Schoolwide Discipline Procedures

Progress Improvement Notification (PIN) and Identified Assignments

In order to remain enrolled at Excel Academy, the responsibilities outlined in the Master Agreement, Independent Study Policy, Attendance Policy, Progress Improvement Notification Policy, and Involuntary Withdrawal Policy must be followed. Within these policies, the process for which a student may be involuntarily withdrawn from Excel Academy is outlined. Part of that process includes the issuance of Progress Improvement Notifications (PINs) when a student fails to complete identified assignments key to a student's success in the independent study environment or any other responsibilities outlined in the EACS Handbook, Acknowledgement of Responsibilities, and Master Agreement.

PIN Process for Students with IEPs

EACS is required to provide a FAPE to all students with an IEP. The purpose of the Sped PIN policy is to outline the steps that will be taken if all responsibilities are not fulfilled per the student's active IEP and the EACS AoR.

Link to full [SPED PIN Policy](#)



Governing Board Policies

In addition to attendance, the parent and student must abide by all board approved policies. These policies include, but are not limited to:

- The Academic Integrity Policy
- The Civility Policy
- The Acceptable Use Policy

The complete list of all Board-approved policies as well as how to access them may be found at <https://excelacademy.education/our-board/board-policies>

Translation in primary language can be provided upon request.

Procedural Safeguards

Individuals with disabilities and their parents are afforded rights and procedural safeguards to

ensure that all individuals with disabilities are provided a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Parents can obtain assistance in understanding their rights and procedural safeguards from the Excel Academy Charter School Special Education Department, the Sonoma County SELPA, or the California Department of Education.

Excel Academy's special education department receives general operational support and guidance from the Sonoma County Charter SELPA (sonomaselpa.org). Please refer to the following links for the most current Notice of Procedural Safeguards. If you require translation in a language other than those presently available on the website below, please contact our office for assistance.

<https://www.sonomaselpa.org/info/notice-of-procedural-safeguards>



Frequently Asked Questions

1. I think my child's sibling may need special education services. Who do I call?

Please contact EACS' School Psychologist, Noell Scott, at nscott@excelacademy.education for additional information.

2. My student has a private specialist they really enjoy working with. How can I request that we work with them for their IEP services?

EACS will not accept requests to develop new relationships with specific special education agencies or providers. The internal special education team currently includes a staff of highly qualified and appropriately credentialed professionals to provide the majority of IEP services. For any specialty areas in which we do not employ internal staff, an appropriate NPA-approved provider will be identified and assigned within your county of residence.

3. What is the process for requesting a new Case Manager or IEP service provider?

Due to the complex nature of matching IEP teams to hundreds of students across several counties, the EACS team is not able to consider requests for specific Case Managers, providers, or related service agencies.

**If you have a concern to report regarding your Case Manager or a related service provider failing to implement your student's IEP, please contact Angela Garbe, Program Specialist at agarbe@excelacademy.education.*

4. I work full time. How am I expected to keep up with the expectations of this school?

EACS provides support to students and families in successfully accessing and participating in independent study. All EACS students must additionally have the support of a primary educator in the home setting during the school day; usually a parent or guardian. We understand that each of our families have different personal circumstances, however, the success of your student in our independent study placement depends largely on the ability of a consistent adult to provide core instruction.

5. I recently received a new diagnosis from my student's pediatrician that may affect their learning. Do I need to inform the IEP team?

Anytime you have new information regarding your child that may affect their learning it is important to share with the IEP team. Please contact your Case Manager with this information and an IEP meeting will be called to review any new records and discuss if any changes to the current IEP are necessary.

6. I have private speech, PT and OT services through my insurance. Can I choose to only attend those instead of the IEP services EACS offered to address my student's needs?

EACS is required to ensure the provision of all services to your student, by qualified personnel, in accordance with their current IEP offer of FAPE. We understand that many students additionally receive privately funded services outside of school hours however they cannot replace educationally-based services. If you believe your student no longer requires these services to address their unique educational needs, please contact your student's Case Manager to request an IEP meeting and discuss their progress.

7. I am not willing to transport my student to multiple locations during the week to meet with their IEP service providers. Can I change all their IEP services to virtual delivery?

EACS is a flexible, Independent Study charter school. All special education services are either provided virtually, in-person at a service provider's clinic/agency, or in-person at a mutually agreed location between the student's home and the service provider's location. Service delivery setting (in-person or virtual) is an IEP team decision determined according to the individual student's needs as a result of their disability. Travel distance is not a consideration when determining whether virtual or in-person services are appropriate.

8. Can I request all individual service delivery? My student doesn't do well in groups.

Service delivery is an IEP team decision based on the recommendation of the service provider and team discussion. The IEP team will consider the student's specific needs and IEP goals as a guide when determining the appropriate service delivery group size for each individual student. At times it may be appropriate for a student to receive special education services within a small group setting to support goal progress, while at other times individual services are determined appropriate.

9. How do I request a copy of my student's special education records?

Please contact registrar@excelacademy.education.

10. I have a question about my student's recent IEP. Who do I contact?

Your first point of contact for all questions regarding any portion of your student's IEP, or the implementation of services, is your student's current Case Manager.

Glossary of Terms

AoR: Acknowledgment of Responsibilities

AP: Assessment Plan

APE: Adapted Physical Education

CAA: California Alternate Assessment

CAASPP: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress
CM: Case Manager
COC: Certificate of Completion
Ed Code: California's comprehensive guideline of laws and regulations for special education
ESY: Extended School Year
FAPE: Free and Appropriate Public Education
IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP: Individualized Education Plan
IF: Instructional Funds
ITP: Individual Transition Plan
LEA: Local Education Agency
LP: Learning Period
LRE: Least Restrictive Environment
MA: Master Agreement
OT: Occupational Therapy
PIN: Progress Improvement Notification
PT: Physical Therapy
PWN: Prior Written Notice
SAI: Specialized Academic Instruction
SLP: Speech and Language Pathologist
WIN: "What I Need" - EACS Intervention Program