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S. Serving Students with Special Needs

Aspen Ridge is an inclusive *community of students, teachers, parents, and administrators collaborating to traverse a common, shared body of knowledge along the rigorous, content-rich Aspen Ridge Trailways thereby fostering a lifelong love of learning and discovery.* Aspen Ridge is designed as an inclusive school, a school without labels. Students of all abilities and disabilities will have equal access to the educational and enrichment programs of Aspen Ridge.

Aspen Ridge intends to serve a diverse population of students, reflective of the local area, who desires a learning community that recognizes scholarship, academic achievement, and creativity while respecting each student as a valued individual of great potential and promise. Within the diverse population of students will be those who are gifted in various areas as well as those students who may be at-risk for academic failure. The Founders of Aspen Ridge intend to meet each student's individual needs with ongoing assessment, ability grouping, and Personal Education Plans which allow students to set and achieve individual goals.

Aspen Ridge believes that the strongest partner in any child's education is the parent. Therefore, the parent will be integral to the PEP development and review for all students. When applicable, parents will be vital contributors to the RtI process and the identification of appropriate interventions, and as necessary the IEP and or 504 Plan Team. The parent will be invited to share probable causes for the student's performance and identification as at-risk, as well as suggest possible intervention strategies. Information obtained by parents from private parties, such as medical doctors and family therapists will be considered when assessing and evaluating, determining strategies and interventions, and/or considering eligibility for services.

Aspen Ridge embraces the Response to Intervention (RtI) process to enhance the success of all students with a variety of academic and/or behavior needs. In alignment with Tier I, the Universal Level, prevention of academic deficits for many students is possible through a well-planned program of academic instruction. Aspen Ridge has assembled a rigorous academic program based on research-proven curricula - a common mountain of knowledge with the *Core Knowledge Sequence, the Aspen Ridge Trailways* which provide the pathways for traversing the mountain, and the individual curricula components that are the tools for helping students reach the summit.

The development and quarterly review of the PEP provides for recognition of student's individual strengths and needs, establishment of individual goals, and identification of specific interventions. Differentiated instruction and ability grouping in both reading and math allow for students to work at their individual level and teachers to focus instruction on specific skills, providing for academic success. A research-proven program for English Language Learners and a knowledgeable team of educators will make accommodations for students with special needs to ensure the success of students with diverse learning needs.

Despite best efforts at prevention, some students will enter the school with deficits, some students will be slower to perform on grade level, and some students may be under-achieving according to their measured ability levels. As defined by Colorado RtI Model definitions, a student who does not achieve adequately for the student's age or meet state-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas may be in need of targeted interventions: Oral expression; Listening comprehension; Written expression; Basic reading skill; Reading fluency skills; Reading comprehension; Mathematical calculation; Mathematics problem solving. Aspen Ridge may also consider targeted interventions for students who are habitually truant and/or consistently violate the student behavior expectations. The use of ongoing assessments and the

monitoring of individual progress through the PEP process will assist in the identification of students who meet the above at-risk criteria. In collaboration with teachers, administrators, parents, and students immediate interventions will be identified for students who meet any of the above criteria.

In Alignment with Tier II of the Rtl process, Aspen Ridge will implement targeted interventions and monitor the academic progress of at-risk students. Students who meet the criteria of at-risk will be referred by the classroom teacher to the Rtl Team. The Rtl Team will collect data and evidence as to the student's overall performance. This evidence will be reviewed by the Rtl Team along with the parents and student, if age appropriate. The Rtl Team will identify strategies and/or interventions to improve student performance. Interventions may include those offered at Aspen Ridge site and resources available in the community. Student performance data will be tracked and reviewed periodically to determine response to the intervention. Students who demonstrate improved performance as a result of an intervention will continue with the intervention in place in the general education setting. Students who continue to struggle despite various interventions may be referred for a formal evaluation by a school psychologist to determine eligibility for special education services.

As part of the sound educational program established by Aspen Ridge, interventions offered at Aspen Ridge site may include individual or small group tutoring, after school academic programs, ELL programs, assessment for disabilities or special needs, transportation coordination and assistance, and/or behavior support plans. Interventions for at-risk students must clearly align with the student's identified challenges and will be clearly described on the PEP document. At minimum, the effectiveness of the interventions will be assessed quarterly.

Research shows that through a rigorous research-based educational program that is responsive to individual learning needs and combined with targeted interventions when necessary, the vast majority of students will achieve academic success. There are, however, those students for which a more intensive and individual educational program is necessary. For those students who demonstrate chronic or ongoing difficulty with academic or social growth and who have not responded to targeted interventions, further diagnostic assessment may be necessary. Tier III of the Rtl process provides for the assessment of students for specific disabilities and eligibility for services under 504 or IEP plans.

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND 504 SERVICES

Aspen Ridge will be responsible for the development of assessment plans for students with suspected disabilities, in alignment with Sponsoring District procedures and forms. The assessment plan will describe the types of assessments that may be used to determine the eligibility of students for special education instruction and services. Assessments will be conducted, within legal timelines, after receiving the parents' written consent. Aspen Ridge shall conduct an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meeting that includes required team members within mandated timelines for each

student assessed to discuss results, determine eligibility, and (if eligible) specify special education and /or 504 Plan instruction and services. Aspen Ridge will make decisions regarding eligibility, goals, program, placement, and exit from special education through the IEP and/or 504 Plan process according to federal, state and Sponsoring District timelines.

Aspen Ridge will work collaboratively with the Sponsoring District to ensure delivery of services as designated on students' IEPs. The Sponsoring District supports students with disabilities attending charter schools commensurate with district schools and for purposes of special education, the Sponsoring District will be the LEA of record for Aspen Ridge. Specific details for providing special education services and the Charter School's payment for services will be agreed upon in an annual contract between Aspen Ridge and the Sponsoring District.

Aspen Ridge will make special education services available to exceptional children, including both students with disabilities and gifted students, in accordance with C.R.S. 22-20-103(3.4) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as reauthorized, including:

- An equal opportunity for all children who may not be denied on the basis of a disability
- A written Individualized Education Program (IEP) for all students identified and qualified as having a disability and receiving special education services
- A free and appropriate public education program, this program to be determined on an individual case-by-case basis depending on each student's unique needs and which may be challenged by the student's parent(s) through due process procedures
- A least restrictive environment or "natural environment" in consideration of the following factors: (1) a comparison between educational benefits available to a disabled student in a traditional classroom and a special education classroom; (2) the non-academic benefits to the student with a disability from interacting with non-disabled students; (3) the degree of disruption of the education of other students resulting in the inability to meet the unique needs of the disabled student
- Due process requirements which include notification of parent(s) of the intent to evaluate for special education and consent to this process by the parent(s).
- Nondiscriminatory evaluation procedures for children with IEP's

The Sponsoring District shall supervise special education services at the Charter School. Aspen Ridge will employ/contract qualified, licensed personnel, with experience in ability grouping, classroom differentiation, compaction, and subject matter acceleration strategies for exceptional children to deliver and monitor the prescribed program in an IEP. The Sponsoring District will provide itinerant staff who are district employed (psychologist, speech, OT, PT) for the provision of related services in accordance with a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504. Special education personnel will work with students, classroom teachers, and parents to identify and

develop strategies for meeting the needs of students with diverse learning styles and disabilities.

In the event that Aspen Ridge is unable to provide an appropriate placement or services for a student with special needs, the Charter School will contact the Sponsoring District to discuss placement and service alternatives. Placement options shall be recommended by the Sponsoring District during the IEP meeting. Charter School IEP teams will ensure participation of a Sponsoring District special education representative at an IEP team meeting whenever it is anticipated that special education programs outside of the Charter School, including but not limited to placement at a Sponsoring District school or at a non-public or private school, will be considered.

INSTRUCTIONAL MODELS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

All students at Aspen Ridge will be challenged on their independent learning levels through Personal Education Plans, a rigorous curriculum, and the use of ability grouping. Aspen Ridge supports the movement of students with disabilities into less restrictive environments and increased interactions of students with disabilities with non-disabled students. Aspen Ridge's program of instruction for students with disabilities shall be responsive to the required sequence of courses and related curricular activities provided for all students in Aspen Ridge. Assessment and standardized testing procedures shall be implemented, including guidelines for modifications and adaptations, to monitor student progress.

As focus will be on an inclusive setting and delivering instruction in the general education classroom, an emphasis on staff development and in-service will be maintained to ensure that all classroom teachers use effective strategies to ensure student success. Accommodations for students are made following the principles outlined in *Teaching Kids with Learning Difficulties in the Regular Classroom* by Susan Winebrenner. Behavior Support Plans will be individualized, responsive to the needs of the student, and support the student in all settings.

Gifted students are no exception to the philosophy of achieving individual goals and demonstrating personal growth in achievement. Teachers will utilize the tools set forth in Susan Winebrenner's book, *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*. The book is written based upon Winebrunner's own experiences as well of those of other creative teachers to provide a blueprint for teachers who wish to involve, excite, and entice gifted students to be learners. It also addresses the competitive nature of some gifted students and how to address and embrace that characteristic to achieve, learn and contribute in school while setting the academic goals high enough to challenge, but not too high that they become unattainable. At Aspen Ridge, it is our vision to challenge each student appropriately so they can reach their personal best in all academic areas.

Some students enrolled at Aspen Ridge will be English Language Learners (ELL). Aspen Ridge will employ an ELL specialist to work with students who need ELL services. Students with a need for ELL services will be placed in the regular classroom

for the majority of the day. They may be pulled out to work one on one or in a small group on their English language skills on an occasional basis. It is a goal of Aspen Ridge to be an inclusive environment. With full immersion in an English language program, ELL students will flourish, learning skills from their peers and teachers, while still having the support of an ELL specialist.

Aspen Ridge will comply with all required aspects of monitoring, assessing, and ensuring growth of students in the area of language acquisition. The goal will be to create a learning environment whereby all English Language Learners achieve the same challenging grade level standards as native-English speaking students. Through a small school environment focusing on individualized and personalized attention via PEP, differentiated instruction, ability grouping, and the Rtl process, this goal is attainable. Students' progress in acquiring English proficiency will be determined by using the California English Language Assessment (CELA) to assess listening, speaking, reading, writing, oral language and comprehension.

The CELA Placement Test will be initially administered to any student new to Aspen Ridge or Sponsoring District who has been identified by a home language survey as having a primary home language other than English and has not been previously assessed with the CELA. Annually, the CELA Proficiency Test will be administered to those students identified by the Placement test as Non-English proficient (NEP) or Limited-English proficient (LEP) and are receiving program services.

Aspen Ridge will implement the following curricular plan to meet the needs of its ELL students:

- All teachers will know the classification levels of ELL students assigned to their classroom for instruction.
- Colorado's ELD Standards for listening, speaking, reading, and writing will be used as a guide to instruct students on a daily basis.
- Differentiated instruction and ability grouping will be used in an inclusive setting.
- Cooperative learning activities and instructional strategies embedded in SFA Reading programs will enhance instructional opportunities with ELL students.
- *On Our Way to English*, published by Rigby/Harcourt will be implemented for direct ELD instruction in a pull-out format.
- Progress will be monitored with the goal of one level progress per year through the process of attaining fluency.
- Reclassification will be based upon parent participation/opinions, two measurable indicators and a recommendation from the teacher based upon academic achievement (e.g. CSAP (proficiency level), CELA scores, and a classroom achievement grade of a B or higher).

With regard to Aspen Ridge's general curriculum program, the Success for All Foundation has conducted research and developed materials to provide schools with resources to meet the challenges of their linguistically and culturally diverse populations. Cooperative learning, a teaching methodology at the core of all SFA programs, is ideally suited to the need of ELL students. Students work with teams to

study and learn together, practice skills, and exchange roles as teachers and learners. These small groups provide a “safe place” for ELL students to interact with their peers, practice language, and work on academic tasks. Systematic, daily contact with native speakers provides the invaluable, authentic language practice that is necessary to truly acquire language.

The research-based curriculum materials developed by the Success for All Foundation also include ELD strategies built into each lesson. There are no separate ELL lessons that require special grouping, additional teachers/aides or alternate assessment measures. Lessons are structured so that ELL students are studying material on their grade level with native English speakers but still receiving the support they need to make the lessons comprehensible. Keeping students at a challenging level while providing targeted assistance, enables them to achieve at the same rate as other students.

There are a range of supports in place. Reading materials identify important vocabulary for ELL students in each lesson, and suggest different ways of presenting it to ensure comprehension (proven techniques such as realia, TPR, pantomime, and choral response are all used). Curriculum support materials such as colorful vocabulary cards, puppets, and letter-blending cards provide strong visuals to aid in retention of new vocabulary and concepts. Assessment measures help pinpoint problem areas in vocabulary, oral language production and comprehension so these skills can be addressed directly, depending on the needs of individual students. Videos and DVDs, created exclusively for ELL students (but beneficial and enjoyable for all students) address important skills such as phonemic awareness, letter sounds, sound blending, vocabulary development, and specific reading strategies and skills (reading with fluency, making predictions, and monitoring for meaning and others).

T. Dispute Resolution

Aspen Ridge recognizes a there may be need for formal complaint procedures, employee grievance procedures, and dispute resolution procedures, at some point in time.

Formal complaint procedures are outlined in the Complaint Policy included in Appendix O of this document. For purpose of this policy a formal complaint may involve student-to-student, adult-to-student, adult (parent or other)-to-adult (school employee). A formal complaint form must be completed and submitted to the Administrator for investigation and resolution. Aspen Ridge will have forty-five (45) days to render a decision. Decisions may be appealed to the Board of Directors.

Employee grievance procedures are outlined in the Employee Manual included in Appendix L of this document. Upon employment, employees are requested to sign a document agreeing to submit disputes exclusively to binding arbitration under the federal Arbitration Act, 9 U.S.C., Section 1. This arbitration shall be the exclusive means of resolving any dispute arising out of the employment or termination from