



# **SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING AT SPOTTED ZEBRA**

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the Spotted Zebra Learning Center is to provide a transdisciplinary model of best practices in early childhood education programming to children of all abilities. The Spotted Zebra Learning Center is an integrated setting that serves young children, ages three through six, who have developmental delays or identified disabilities, as well as those who have no identified special needs. Children qualifying for special education services under Federal law include those demonstrating a delay in at least one of the areas of physical, cognitive, communication, or social/emotional development. If a child is deemed eligible for preschool special education services, the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) will set a date upon which special education services will begin. This date may be on or after the child's third birthday.

## **Free, Appropriate Public Education**

When a child enters a preschool special education program, he or she is guaranteed all of the protections and benefits of the federal and state special education laws. The central benefit under these laws is a free, appropriate public education. Every qualifying child must receive an appropriate educational program, and the services must be provided without cost to the parents.

## **Least Restrictive Environment**

Every child in special education must be placed in a program which is located in the least restrictive environment. This means a placement as close as possible to a regular education program. If a child is not going to be placed in regular education, the school district must justify the removal from regular education as necessary to meet the child's needs. The least restrictive environment at the preschool level has been interpreted somewhat differently from the least restrictive environment at the elementary level. Depending on their needs, children with special needs at the preschool level are typically served in their home, in their nursery school/daycare setting or in an approved preschool special education program, such as the Spotted Zebra Learning Center.

## **Extended School Year**

Normally, special education services are provided during the regular school year (40 weeks). Extended School Year services may however be written into the IEP and provided to a child during the summer (6 weeks) if it can be proven that a child will regress without it. Extended School Year goals are a continuation of the goals established during the school year. Again, the purpose of the extended school year program is to maintain skills and to prevent regression. It is not intended as an opportunity to achieve new skills and new goals.

## **Transportation**

If a child is approved for a preschool special education program, the county of residence is responsible for transportation to and from the special education program. Typically, counties contract with an outside agency to provide this transportation. Should a family decline transportation and wish to transport their child on their own, they are eligible for mileage reimbursement. **Please let the Spotted Zebra Learning Center staff know whether you will need transportation for your child as this must be arranged prior to the start of the program.**

## **Program Models**

Special education services can be provided to preschool children in a number of ways. The CPSE is free to select any model but must ensure both a free appropriate public education and the least restrictive environment as it identifies an appropriate placement for the child. The following are service options:

- Special Education Itinerant Teacher – special education services are provided in the child's home or nursery school/daycare setting by a traveling special education teacher.
- Center-based programs – special education services are provided in an approved preschool program. The program is either half day (2 ½ hours) or full day (4 or 5 hours) and meets 5 days a week.
  - Integrated Center-Based Models – programming for a child with special needs is provided in a classroom with both children who are identified with special needs and those children that are considered typically developing.

- Self Contained Center-Based Models – programming for a child with special needs is provided in a highly structured and highly staffed program with only children who are identified with special needs. Opportunities for integration are presented when appropriate.

*The Spotted Zebra Learning Center is an approved integrated preschool program with both half day (8:30 AM – 11:00 AM) and full day (8:30 AM – 1:30 PM) options.*

### **Wrap-Around Programming/Enrichment Opportunities**

The Spotted Zebra Learning Center is a family-centered program – our goal is to meet the needs of all families. To that end, we offer wrap-around programming for families that need before/after care as well as enrichment programming that offers additional opportunities for socialization and structured play. Enrichment programs typically begin each day at 3:15 PM. Both wrap-around and enrichment programs are fee-based. Should you wish to access these services, please talk with the Spotted Zebra Learning Center staff.

### **The Curriculum and the Individual Education Plan**

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) objectives are embedded in a play-based curriculum, and learning experiences are both child initiated and teacher facilitated. Developmentally and age-appropriate activities are aligned with New York State's Early Learning Standards. The Spotted Zebra Learning Center also works closely with an early childhood program faculty member from the College of Saint Rose to make certain that teachers are creating and delivering programming that will ensure that children are kindergarten ready when they leave the Spotted Zebra Learning Center.

The IEP must be reviewed periodically because needs and goals may need to be modified. At a minimum, the IEP must be reviewed and rewritten at least annually. The annual review involves testing and reevaluation of the child's strengths and weaknesses and goal achievement.

### **Qualified Personnel**

Special education and related services for preschool children must be provided by qualified personnel. These professionals must have the training to hold licenses in their specific fields. The Spotted Zebra Learning Center is fortunate to have an excellent team of professionals, all of whom have many years of experience in early childhood education and special education.

### **Parent Communication**

Parent communication is a two-way street. The staff will endeavor to keep in touch with parents as often as possible. While daily notes are sent home from the classroom teachers, special education teachers and therapists providing related services typically send home notes on a weekly basis. Parental cooperation in answering notes and the like greatly helps the staff in knowing how best to serve your child. Our preschool staff shall make every attempt to involve families in all aspects of programming and services being received by their child. During the school year, written progress reports will be provided to families in November, January, April and June.

### **Therapies**

Therapists will typically determine a therapy schedule at the onset of services. Sometimes, this schedule may need to be modified in order to accommodate another therapist, etc... Missed sessions due to a child absence, school closing or therapist absence may not be able to be made up. While we will do our best in all situations, the opportunity to make up a missed session is contingent on another child's absence.

### **Kindergarten and Transition**

As a child's sixth birthday comes closer, a number of important decisions have to be made. First, if the child has been identified as a "preschooler with disabilities", that generic classification must now be changed to one of the seven disabling conditions found in special education law for school-aged children. Secondly is placement - specifically how the CPSE and CSE (Committee on Special Education) collaboratively will determine the appropriate placement for the student entering kindergarten. Each school district has a number of different options available to families. The Spotted Zebra Learning Center team will work with the families to best prepare them for this transition.

**Please remember that all too often we become caught up in the process and forget the ultimate goals of education are learning and instilling the love of learning. Fortunately our children are there to teach us that *“life is like a box of chocolates and each individual piece is to be savored for its own delectable goodness.”*(the quoted portion of the statement is from Forrest Gump)**