

FREEDOM AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
SPECIAL EDUCATION INFORMATION NOTICE | CHILD FIND NOTICE
PROCEDURES TO LOCATE, IDENTIFY, AND EVALUATE STUDENTS

As prescribed by section 1402 of the School Code, the Freedom Area School District routinely conducts a visual acuity screening for all students at each grade level and a hearing acuity screening in kindergarten and grades 1, 2, 3, 7, and 11. Speech and language skills are screened for students in kindergarten based on teacher consultation and referrals. A Home Language Survey is completed for all students at registration to screen for English as a Second Language services. Specific needs from screening are recorded in the child's official file. Screening information may be used by the Student Assistance Program (SAP) Team at each school to plan, implement, and monitor appropriate interventions. Screening information may also indicate a need for further evaluation. Parents and Guardians that have concerns about their student may contact the school Principal, Assistant Principal, or School Counselor to request a screening or SAP Team referral, or may contact the School Psychologist for consideration of additional evaluations that may be needed for their child.

Interventions are designed by the SAP Team to provide for a child's learning including their academic, sensory, physical, speech, social, and behavioral needs, so that students can be successful in the general education curriculum and programming. If a student does not demonstrate progress, then a parent/guardian may be asked for informed consent so that the School District may conduct a multidisciplinary evaluation. The multidisciplinary evaluation is a process of gathering information and completing assessments necessary to design a program for a child's educational needs. Family input is requested and tests, interviews, and other assessments are conducted by teachers and education specialists as necessary to obtain information about a student's educational strengths and needs. A parent or guardian may request in writing that the school district initiate a screening or evaluation of their child if there are concerns at any time. The reason for referral should be stated in the letter and it should be submitted to the School Psychologist.

Once the evaluation is completed, an Evaluation Report (ER) is prepared. The ER includes findings from school records, observations, and assessment data, information about the child's strengths and needs, a statement as to whether a child is exceptional, and if so, specific recommendations necessary to best inform subsequent educational programming. The ER is distributed to team members for review and signature, and a meeting is offered to the team to discuss findings. The School District will then notify and invite parents, guardians, and students in writing, or through a series of documented telephone calls or home visits, of the opportunity to participate in an educational/team meeting during which the multidisciplinary evaluation will be discussed and any subsequent educational programming developed. The educational team may consist of the following members: the parents/guardians, the student, a school principal/assistant principal, a special education teacher, a general education teacher, the school psychologist, school social worker, and/or school counselor, the director of special education, and other teachers or educational specialists as necessary and appropriate based on

a student's presenting needs. The parents/guardians, and students, if age 14 or older, are required to discuss transition planning for any students identified with a school-age disability.

In advance of the IEP meeting, procedural safeguards are provided to families that describe rights and protections afforded to parents/guardians and students related to identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities. These include the parent and guardian rights to be notified about a student's program, progress, and any substantive changes in programming and/or placement, the right to approve or reject programs and evaluation, and the right to privacy of educational records. If a student is determined to be eligible for special education support and services, the educational team will develop a written Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP includes information about the student's present levels of academic and functional performance, strengths, needs, and identifies annual goals and objectives. The IEP also includes modifications, any needed related services, and outlines for accommodations. Upon completion of the meeting and development of the IEP, the parents and/or guardians are presented with a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP), which indicates level, type, and placement where services will be provided. Parents/Guardians may choose to agree or disagree with the educational recommendation of the NOREP. There is an opportunity to resolve disagreements through informal meetings, conferences, mediation, a pre-hearing conference, or due process hearing.

Information regarding student services, special education, and programs offered through Freedom Area School District is available upon request from the building Principals or the Director of Student Services and Special Education, Isaac Tarbell at 724-775-7400, Extension 125.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

The Freedom Area School District provides special education programming and related services to meet the needs of students identified with school-age disabilities. The school district also provides programs and services to students identified as gifted. The following types of services/supports are available for student placement, either at a school building located in or outside the school district: learning support, emotional support, life skills support, speech and language support, physical support, autistic support, multiple disability support, and gifted support. Children with disabilities are supported based on individual needs. The individualized programs and services that are provided to eligible students are determined through the student's IEP team. In addition, psychological, counseling, speech and language, hearing, gifted, physical therapy, occupational therapy, nursing, orientation/mobility, and vision support services are available at each school building. Sensory friendly spaces are also accessible to students as part of their educational setting. Students who require support and programming outside of what can be offered at Freedom Area School District may attend programming in approved private schools and licensed private school settings as determined appropriate by the IEP team. However, the District makes every effort to provide supplemental aids and services to maintain student's access to general education classes and non-disabled peers within comprehensive school settings. All services and programs are offered to the child at the Freedom Area School District's expense.

PROTECTED HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

In compliance with state and federal law, the Freedom Area School District will provide to each protected handicapped student, without discrimination or cost to the student or family, those related aids, services, or accommodations which are needed to provide equal opportunity to participate in and obtain the benefits of the school program and extracurricular activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the student's abilities. These aids, services, and accommodations may include, but are not limited to, specialized transportation, modified equipment, adjustments in the student's program, or the administration of needed medication. In order to qualify as a protected handicapped student, the child must be of school age with a physical or mental disability which substantially limits or prohibits participation in or access to an aspect of the school program. These services and protections for "protected handicapped students" are distinct from those applicable to all disabled students enrolled (or seeking enrollment) in special education programs. For further information on the evaluation procedures and provision of services to students with disabilities, contact Isaac J. Tarbell, Director of Special Education | Homeless and Foster Liaison, Freedom Area School District, 1702 School Street, Freedom, PA 15042 (Phone: 724-775-7400 Ext. 125).

STANDARDIZED TESTING PROGRAM

During enrollment in the Freedom Area School District, various standardized tests are administered to students. The results of the tests provide a continuous record of achievement that is used for educational planning purposes. Test results are also valuable to the Student Assistance Programming Team (SAP). The SAP team consists of Teachers, Administrators, School Psychologist, School Counselors, and Prevention Specialist. This team works through data-based decision making to identify and remove barriers to student learning. The results of these assessments, as well as scores received from supplemental academic assessments taken by elective at the secondary level, are maintained and made part of the education record. This record also consists of grades, academic work completed, and attendance. The School District's standardized testing program consists of the following tests:

Assessment Tool	Grade Level Administered
BVIU Early Intervention Screening	PreK-Kindergarten
Universal Curriculum-Based Screening	K-8
Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)	Gifted Screening
PA State System of Assessment-Reading/Math	3 - 8

PA State System of Assessment-Writing	5, 8
PA State System of Assessment-Science	4, 8
Keystone Exam in Algebra, Literature, and Biology	At the completion of aligned courses
PA Alternate System of Assessment (PASA)	3-8, 11
WIDA-Access	Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

EDUCATION RECORDS/PRIVACY RIGHTS OF PARENTS AND STUDENTS

The Freedom Area School District and its employees are required by federal law, and state and federal rules and regulations, to protect the rights of students. The foundation of these rights comes from federal legislation entitled Family Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (also known as the Buckley Amendment). There are also state rules and regulations regarding regular and special education students' rights, including those related to privacy. All students are protected by the State regulations contained in Chapter 12, known as Students: Rights and Responsibilities.

The basic assurance of the above-mentioned laws, rules, and regulations is that information about students cannot be disclosed without written informed parent/guardian consent. There are three different categories of information maintained by the school including education records, personally identifiable information, and directory information. Educational records consist of information directly related to a student, which are maintained by an educational agency. Personally identifiable information includes the student's name, the name of the parents/guardians or other family members, and a personal identifier or a list of personal characteristics that would make the student's identity easily traceable. Education records and personally identifiable information cannot be disclosed or released without written parent/guardian consent or, if a student is over 18, without student consent.

School records are always open and available to parents/guardians, as well as to those school officials with a legitimate need to know. Information from school records may be released to other persons or agencies only with appropriate authorization that requires written, signed permission from parents/guardians. Communication with parents/guardians and exceptional students shall be in their native language.

Information that can be released without consent is called directory information. Directory information refers to information contained in an educational record of a student which would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed. The School District designates which information is labeled as directory information. It shall include the following:

the student's name, address, date and place of birth, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height, membership on athletic teams, dates of attendance, degrees and awards received, and the most recent previous educational agency or institution that the student attended.

Parents/Guardians have the right to refuse to let the School District release directory information pertaining to their child. If you refuse to permit the School District to release any or all directory information pertaining to your child, your objection must be received by the District in writing.

Disclosure of information means to permit access to, or the release, transfer, or other communication of education records, or the personally identifiable information contained in these records, to any party, by any means, including oral, written, or electronic means. This means that information about a student cannot be shared even in conversation without permission, and applies to Freedom Area School District personnel who do not have an educationally relevant reason to possess such knowledge of the student.

Written informed consent is necessary for disclosure of personally identifiable information and educational records. The consent must:

- Specify the records that may be disclosed,
- State the purpose of the disclosure, and
- Identify the party or class of parties to whom the disclosure may be made.

Furthermore, Freedom Area School District must maintain a written record of disclosure for the parent/guardian to inspect in case information has been released.

If a student transfers to another school system, records will be forwarded to the new school upon receipt of written notification of enrollment. Parental permission is not required.

A high school transcript will be released to post-secondary educational institutions or prospective employers only upon a parent's and/or student's written authorization.

A copy of the school district education records policy is located in the Principal's office of each school, as well as the District Administrative Offices, and is available for inspection upon written request.

The District's policy on student records, which is in compliance with Pennsylvania State Board of Education regulations and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), affords parents and students over 18 years of age ("eligible students") certain rights with respect to the student's education records until age of majority (21). These rights are:

1. The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days of the day the School receives a request for access.
 - Parents or eligible students should submit to the School principal [or appropriate school official] a written request that identifies the record(s) they wish to inspect.

The School official will make arrangements for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.

2. The right to request the amendment of the student's education records that the parent or eligible student believes are inaccurate.
 - Parents or eligible students may ask the School to amend a record that they believe is inaccurate. They should write to the School principal [or appropriate school official], clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it is inaccurate. If the School decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, the School will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and advise them of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent or eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

3. The right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent.
 - One exception, which permits disclosure without consent, is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. A school official is a person employed by the School as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel); a person serving on the School Board; a person or company with whom the School has contracted to perform a special task (such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist); or a parent or student serving on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee, or assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks.
 - A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

4. The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by the School District to comply with the requirements of FERPA. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA are:

Family Policy Compliance Office
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-4605

NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

The Freedom Area School District, an equal opportunity employer, will not discriminate in employment, educational programs, or activities based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, ancestry, physical handicap, or union membership. This policy of nondiscrimination extends to all other legally protected classifications. Publication of the policy is in accordance with state and federal laws, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1978, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.