

FRIENDS of MANSEF



An Important Message About Nonpublic Special Education

The Friends of MANSEF serves in an advisory capacity to the MANSEF Board of Directors for two purposes: (1) to address matters of family involvement and communication, and (2) to act as a core group of advocates to help educate government leaders, policy makers and members of the general public about the educational needs of children with disabilities.

All parents are concerned about the quality of their child's education, including parents of children with special needs and learning challenges. If your child has special needs and you have concerns regarding the appropriateness of the instruction your child is receiving, you have the right to discuss the possibility of her/his placement in a nonpublic special education school.

Key Points:

1) Nonpublic schools are vital to the fulfillment of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA mandates a "continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services." Nonpublic schools are one component in that continuum, and fulfill a unique and essential role in meeting some students' particular educational needs. Nonpublic schools serve an important role for Maryland to comply with federal law regarding education for special needs students. **IDEA does not require every child to be placed in the public school classroom.**

2) Nonpublic schools are uniquely equipped to provide the specific, multidisciplinary, frequently intensive resources students with special needs require. The scope and depth of staff expertise afford specialized, integrated programming that goes beyond academic education and encompass the social and emotional well-being of each student. In addition to the skilled, highly trained teachers and related service providers, nonpublic schools are staffed to provide other such critical services as behavior programs, crisis management and medical attention.

"My son's ability to successfully obtain competitive employment in the community and to successfully participate in a variety of community activities was made possible because of the intensive services and supports he received in a nonpublic program during his high school years."

—Linda Carter-Ferrier, parent

3) The least restrictive environment (LRE) is different for every student as outlined in IDEA and a **nonpublic special education school may be the LRE for some students.**

The LRE is where the child's educational needs can be met. LRE does not consider whether a public school, nonpublic special education school or a disability-only charter school operates the classroom. A separate public-based program is not less restrictive than a nonpublic special education school.

LRE is not simply a matter of keeping students in local public schools. The least restrictive and appropriate placement for a student must have all necessary supports and services to enable him or her to learn and to fully participate as a valued member of the school community. Students should not need to fail in a less restrictive placement before a nonpublic program is provided.

- 4) Partnering is powerful.** Nonpublic special education schools have reached out to public school systems to create partnerships that bring the highly regarded expertise and experience of MANSEF into local public schools via programming housed within those settings. Our goal is to implement specialized programs to support the educational success of students with special needs.
- 5) Placement must be individually determined.** A local public school system cannot *unilaterally* decide to bring all students placed at a nonpublic special education school back to an in-district program, nor can it decide that all students with a *particular* disability must be educated within its schools. IDEA requires the placement decision for each student to be made individually by the IEP team. Parents are a part of the process.
- 6) Benefits of nonpublic special education.** Students feel much more included and valued when they are truly part of their school community. In nonpublic special education schools, students have a real opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of school life—from sports, clubs, plays and school government to talent shows and the prom. They participate, not by being “assigned to a peer” or as someone’s “buddy,” but as a person, an individual—and often, as the leader.
- 7) Location of program is NOT an outcome.** MANSEF collects data on what happens to students after they leave nonpublic schools. Recent data show that at least 85 percent of students in elementary and middle schools advance to the next grade each year with proficiency in curriculum-taught subjects; 63 percent of graduates have successfully enrolled in post-secondary education institutions or technical school and apprenticeship settings—nearly 20 percent higher than the national rate. Nonpublic special education school graduates go to college, trade schools, jobs and the military, and are linked with post-secondary service providers at impressive rates. **It is the outcome that matters—not just where the services are delivered.** (For more results, please see the MANSEF post-secondary outcomes study at www.MANSEF.org.)

- 8) Nonpublic special education is NOT more costly.** This has nothing to do with LRE, but it has been the focus of many decisions that deny a student’s necessary services. Nonpublic special education schools deliver the mandated services in a way that is cost-effective, efficient and beneficial to the students. The nonpublic special education schools are financially responsible providers of vitally needed educational services delivered in small therapeutic settings that are community based—unlike their public school partners, which serve up to hundreds or thousands of students in one building.

Please contact us if you have any questions:
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For a directory of schools, visit www.mansef.org