



Opportunity Academies: Special Education Programming

Overview

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) will now have four Opportunity Academies designed to meet the needs of over-age and under-credited students. Opportunity Academies operate on semester schedules that will enable students to earn credits more quickly and will utilize a highly personalized instructional approach with an intensive focus on social emotional well-being and post-secondary success. The Academies are designed to help students graduate and prepare for a bright future.

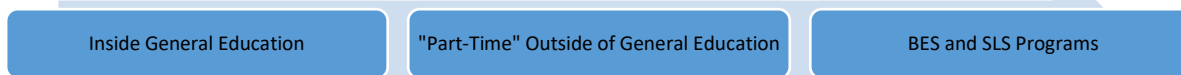
DCPS Opportunity Academies offer a continuum of special education services for over-age, under-credited students with disabilities. This practice is consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which mandates that students with disabilities be provided access to the same curriculum as, and be educated with, their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

All Opportunity Academies can implement Individualized Education Plans (IEP) that provide for less than twenty hours of specialized instruction outside of the general education (OGE) classroom. In the 2017-18 school year, Washington Met and Ballou STAY will additionally have capacity to serve a limited number of students with IEPs that provide for twenty hours or more of specialized instruction outside of general education. Both Washington Met and Ballou STAY will each have a Behavior and Education Supports (BES) and a Specific Learning Supports (SLS) classroom. These programs are described more fully below, and more information about all special education programming is available in the Division of Specialized Instruction (DSI) Special Education Programs and Resources Guide for Families ([insert weblink](#)).

To be considered for a seat in a BES or SLS classroom at Ballou STAY or Washington Met, students must meet the criteria identified below. Seats in these programs are managed through a centralized Location of Service (LOS) process.

DCPS generally considers Opportunity Academies to be a lateral move along the continuum of services; not a more restrictive environment. Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) must opt into a location of service at an Opportunity Academy which they can do by contacting the school directly, or reaching out to the BES or SLS program manager directly. Those who opt into the Opportunity Academies will have access to unique transition programming options which includes participation in paid work experiences. Program highlights are detailed below.

Once attending, all students with IEPs will undergo a 30-day review meeting to ensure that the services provided at the Opportunity Academies are appropriate to meet a student's needs IEPs may change based on individual student needs assessed throughout the 30-day review process.



Specialized Instruction Settings	
Inside of General Education: Students receive services in the general education setting.	
Fewer than 20 hours of specialized instruction OGE	Students receive services inside of a special education classroom for part of the day. The students spend the remainder of the day in the general education classroom or in activities with students who do not have disabilities.
20 hours or more of specialized instruction OGE	If a student has 20 or more hours of specialized instruction per week OGE, the student receives the majority of his/her instruction in an academic program setting (e.g. BES or SLS).
30 Day Review	Enrolled students with IEPs should expect a 30-day review of the IEP to determine whether the program is appropriate.
Enrollment: Criteria and Processes	
High Level Guidelines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students must opt into enrollment in a special education program at an Opportunity Academy; It is not a mandatory move. All schools are required to provide FAPE for students with disabilities until the semester they turn 22. Comprehensive high schools must provide students every opportunity to complete a diploma up to age 22. Seats in these programs are managed through a centralized Location of Service (LOS) process. Recommendations for transition to the Opportunity Academies should be guided by the following factors: 	
Overall	Students with IEPs can be recommended for the Opportunity Academy if they are unlikely to complete diploma requirements by age 22; Minimal to no progress towards a diploma; student is 2+ years behind grade level; Truancy affects academic progress; student is non-responsive to documented academic interventions, FBA and BIP revision, and other school interventions.
Lateral Move	Students who meet the criteria to attend an opportunity academy must opt into the program and will be considered for enrollment based on available seats.
External Candidates	Students with IEPs have a right to enroll in their neighborhood schools. Students who meet the criteria to attend an opportunity academy must opt into the program and will be considered for enrollment based on available seats.
Characteristics of BES and SLS Programs	
Students may opt-in to the Opportunity Academy full-time BES and SLS programs if they meet the criteria as described below in the Enrollment: Criteria and Process section.	
Behavior & Education Supports (BES) Program	The Behavior & Education Support program is designed to meet the individual needs of students with emotional/behavioral disabilities or who exhibit behaviors that significantly interfere with learning despite multiple interventions. Students in the BES program have IEPs providing for 20+ hours of specialized instruction outside of general education and current Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).
Specific Learning Supports (SLS) Program	The Specific Learning Support (SLS) program is designed to meet the individual needs of students who have been diagnosed with a specific learning disability (SLD) or who demonstrate complex learning needs requiring intensive specialized instruction. Students in

	the SLS program have IEPs providing for 20+ hours of specialized instruction outside of general education.
Learning Environment	SLS and BES students may be in the same classroom. Ballou STAY and Washington MET will have the capacity to serve core academic programming in a separate classroom outside of general education (OGE). Electives may be taught in general education classrooms based on program capacity.
Transition Programming	
All students with disabilities who are enrolled in the Opportunity Academies will have an opportunity to participate in a paid work experience, attain soft and hard skills necessary for long-term employment, and explore post-secondary education options.	
General Explorations	General Explorations (GE) is a transition course where students with disabilities are exposed to career based skills that allow them to develop workforce competencies. Students enrolled in the General Explorations transition course will be exposed to a rigorous soft skills and independent living curriculum that is aligned to common core ELA and math standards. As an added incentive, students in the BES and SLS classrooms will have the opportunity to earn while they learn. These students will be paid for their participation in the Work-readiness component of the General Explorations course.
Marriott Foundation, Bridges from School to Work	<i>Bridges...from School to Work</i> is a highly successful transition program for youth with disabilities ages 18-22. The <i>Bridges</i> program helps youth find work in competitive, non-subsidized jobs, that align to their career interest. Students with IEPs at the Opportunity Academies will receive preference for enrollment into the Bridges program.
Case Management	The DCPS Transition Team Job Placement Specialist will provide customized transition case management services for students in the BES and SLS programs who desire to work and/or enroll in postsecondary education training.
Opportunity Academy Program Characteristics	
The Opportunity Academies offer unique and flexible programming to assist students in meeting their goals and successfully completing high school.	
Personalized Learning	Students will engage as self-directed scholars in rigorous, competency-based learning through Summit Personalized Learning .
Social Emotional Learning	Students will have the opportunity to join Dangers of the Mind —a cutting edge program that supports students with social emotional and academic development through self-exploration, skill building and reflection.
Learning will Extend Beyond the Walls	Career Focused Field Trips; Work-based Learning Experiences within the community; General Explorations CLCP elective credit; Opportunities for Paid Internships and Work-readiness training.

Contact Us

BES dcps.bes@dc.gov | SLS dcps.sls@dc.gov | Transition dcps.transition@dc.gov

Special Education Pillars

1. All students with disabilities are capable of accessing grade level content.
2. All students with disabilities have strengths that enable them to learn and grow academically, socially and independently.
3. All students with disabilities deserve access to the general education environment to the greatest extent possible.
4. All students with disabilities deserve access to non-academic school-based activities.
5. All school leaders, teachers, and support staff are fundamentally responsible for the success of students with disabilities.