

# Metropolitan School of Panama

## Inclusion Policy

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### I. Introduction:

This inclusion policy is based on the philosophy and practices of the Metropolitan School of Panama (The MET), the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), and adheres to the requirements of the laws of Panama (See Appendix I). It was developed jointly by members of The MET community to ensure alignment in our philosophy and practices regarding inclusion. It is reviewed yearly and is published for all stakeholders on The MET website.

The aim of this policy is to ensure The MET school community is aware of the principles for inclusion, and to promote and develop practices that enable us to respond to and support all MET students. At The MET, we aim to provide a safe and caring environment, free from

discrimination and to promote equity of access and opportunity for all members of the school community.

#### **a. Our Mission**

The MET is committed to each child reaching their personal level of excellence through a balanced academic program that nurtures their self-esteem, potential and engages them in the world that surrounds them.

#### **b. Our Vision**

To set a new standard of excellence for private schools in Panama by providing a world-class academic program in an educational environment that stimulates the development of talent, the formation of moral character, and a sense of civic responsibility.

#### **c. Inclusion Philosophy**

The MET is committed to creating and reinforcing an inclusive learning culture where every member of the school community is treated with respect, dignity, and empathy. The MET strives to celebrate diversity and attempts to eliminate all forms of discrimination. As an IB World School, it is our mission to support our school community to be Open-Minded, Caring, and Principled, ensuring all members feel welcomed, accepted, and treated equitably regardless of their backgrounds or personal attributes such as race, language, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation and differences in learning and physical ability. This commitment includes all members of our community including staff, students, and their families.

## **II. Inclusion Goals**

At The MET we embrace the international nature of our community and actively seek to understand its diversity. We believe that social-emotional well-being in learning is fundamental for students to achieve their greatest potential. We therefore strive to help young people take pride in their unique identities, and to value and respect the diversity of others.

The MET seeks to:

- recognize and respect diversity of all kinds;
- recognize and respect the individuality of each student;
- recognize that all learners have different learning needs;
- explore opportunities to celebrate achievements by all students so that they feel secure

and know that their contributions at school are valued;

- embrace opportunities for families to share their culture and heritage within the school community;
- value inclusive practices as beneficial to all students;
- promote physical and emotional well-being as cornerstones for learning and self-regulation;
- create and foster safe learning environments for all students;
- raise awareness of issues around current and former inequalities to promote understanding, positive attitudes, and behaviors in tackling bias;
- tailor the classroom environment to accommodate all student's needs;
- use materials that reflect a range of social, cultural, and linguistic background, without stereotyping;
- collaborate with parents, external agencies, and all within school to ensure consistent and informed individual provision;
- encourage our community to understand how their words and actions impact others.

Bullying, harassment, and other forms of inappropriate behavior targeting individuals because of their personal attributes will not be tolerated at The MET. Students who may have experienced or witnessed this type of behavior are encouraged to speak up and inform teachers, caregivers, or counsellors to ensure that inappropriate behavior can be addressed.

### **a. Roles and Responsibilities**

All members of the school community will respect that The MET is a diverse community and approach diversity and inclusivity in the school community with an open mind.

#### **Students will:**

- be active participants in their own learning and become increasingly able to identify strategies that support their learning and self-regulation;
- practice resilience and demonstrate a growth mindset;
- use their voice to support inclusion, for example, through student-led clubs and school leadership positions such as Student Councils;
- prevent bullying by employing strategies learned in bullying prevention programs;
- engage in self-evaluation and reflection and personal goal setting;
- seek support from a trusted member of the school community when encountering situations that involve discrimination or lack of inclusion.

**Teachers will:**

Strive to create an inclusive classroom environment by:

- designing strategies to provide curriculum access to all students;
- providing accommodations and modifications to students whose individualities require so;
- using a broad range of resources representing minority groups within their teaching and learning experiences;
- actively supporting our diverse student population;
- working closely with the EEP assistants and specialist staff to assess the impact of support and interventions and how they can be linked to classroom teaching;
- sharing relevant information with other teachers, leadership team, counselors and authorized external providers, and parents/ guardians;
- raising concerns with the academic team, counselors and/or EEP team by completing a student referral form.

**School leaders will:**

Strive to create an inclusive school environment by:

- supporting the student services departments with inclusive arrangements;
- supporting teachers to implement inclusive classroom practices;
- ensuring that bullying is not permitted, and reports of bullying are documented, investigated, and resolved;
- working with the operations team to ensure accessibility of school facilities for all students;
- regularly reviewing and updating school policies related to inclusive practices in consultation with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lead;
- establishing a purposeful and safe learning environment in line with child safeguarding policies and promoting child safeguarding among staff.

**The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Lead will:**

- Leads in the development of an EDIB action plan that meets the needs of the community (school or office) that is aligned with the NAE Vision and Goals;
- understand the community (school or office) in which they serve;
- engage and communicate with staff and students at a local level;
- engage and facilitate departmental collaboration to spread best EDIB practice;

- support and promote EDIB development and delivery of Professional Development that develops key EDIB skills, knowledge, and behavior;
- promote and drive engagement with EDIB resources for EDIB champions on NAU;
- operate as a facilitator to generate topics and moderate discussion while offering resources or follow-up support;
- ensure local dissemination of key strategic documentation;
- develop data systems to collect, analyze and utilize to make decisions on programs and evaluate their impact.

**The IB coordinators will:**

- support teachers to develop and document units of learning that are inclusive and meet the needs of a diverse population of students;
- support teachers to utilize Universal Design for Learning and differentiation practices in lesson planning and implementation;
- support teachers to develop inclusive assessment practices;
- keep up to date with IB inclusive practices documentation;
- collaborate with other leaders to provide inclusive professional learning opportunities for teachers.

**The Support Service Coordinators will:**

- work with school leaders to determine the strategic development of the Inclusion Policy and its provision in school day to day;
- develop, implement and evaluate strategies to identify students in need of learning support in liaison with teachers and the admissions team;
- coordinate and support specialist teachers in designing, embedding, and monitoring support services;
- maintain effective communication with parents of students receiving learning support;
- maintain and oversee the records of all students with individual needs and students receiving learning support, in accordance with data protection requirements;
- keep up to date with legislation and best practices for inclusion locally and globally;
- liaise with external agencies, including educational psychology services, speech and language and occupational therapists to share relevant information, establish a consistent approach and to maintain child protection and safeguarding procedures.

**The counseling department will:**

- promote the social and emotional well-being of all students by assisting students to:
  - apply academic achievement strategies that increase sense of self-efficacy;
  - manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills;
  - plan for postsecondary pathways;
- provide opportunities for:
  - whole classroom learning for all students;
  - targeted small group counseling as needed;
  - short-term individual counseling as needed;
  - third-party referrals when long-term support is necessary;
- collaborate with families, teachers and administrators to support students.

**Parents or guardians will:**

- respect that The MET is a diverse community;
- be aware of and support The MET's Inclusion Policy;
- share relevant information about their child/ren including details of a particular social, behavioral, or emotional situation, diagnosed learning need and/or disability, and external services currently or previously employed;
- meet with the support team three times a year if their child is receiving inclusive arrangements to ensure the implementation of consistent strategies at home and school;
- discuss options with the support service coordinators as recommended by the school;
- be aware that some support services have additional fees.

### **III. Inclusion in Practice**

#### **a. Universal Design for Learning**

At The MET, we embrace Universal Design for Learning practices with the goal of supporting all students to access the curriculum. Through careful planning, we aim to reduce any barriers students may face when learning new concepts and skills within a regular classroom setting. To reduce these barriers where possible, we offer students agency in the means of representation, expression, and engagement (the 'what, why and how' of learning) on a regular basis.

#### **b. Additional Support**

Though we aim to include all students within regular classroom settings, we acknowledge that the demanding nature of our curriculum may be challenging for some students, and they will require additional learning support to access it and to reach grade-level expectations.

The Exceptional Education Program (EEP) and the English as an Additional Language (EAL) departments provide these services at an additional cost and spaces are limited. The counseling department provides social-emotional support to all students in need, though they may refer families to external providers for long-term support.

It is important to note that our school does not offer specialized psychological, behavioral, or clinical therapies typically required for conditions such as oppositional defiance disorder, moderate to severe social-emotional/behavioral needs, or other disabilities necessitating clinical interventions or specific health support.

### **i. Exceptional Education Program**

The EEP offers the following levels of support:

- **Intermediate:** students receive intervention in one area of need.
- **Comprehensive:** students receive support in two areas of need (mix of interventions and in-class support)
- **Customized:** students receive support up to four areas of need (mix of interventions and in-class support)
- **Customized plus adult support (EEP Learning Support Teacher Assistant):** Students will have special support in all core subjects in small groups or individually.

To identify students who require additional support through the EEP, information about a student's learning needs is collected during the admissions process. Once a student is admitted, a teacher may refer them to EEP at any time. When a referral has been made, initial observations and a trial of basic support strategies will occur. At this time, parents will be invited to collaborate with the school to identify specific needs and strategies. The student's progress is then reviewed by the teachers and EEP specialists to decide whether an external evaluation is needed. A student's level of support (as outlined above) and specific learning plan is developed using information from the external evaluation as well as assessments and observations completed at The MET.

According to the trimestral student progress, services level can be maintained, increased, or

decreased based on a re-evaluation of student needs. EEP services are automatically renewed until the student meets the exit criteria required. Exiting from the Exceptional Education Program (EEP) is determined by grade level and/or formal evaluation results, the recommendation of the interdisciplinary team, and it is addressed through the EEP Coordinator's approval.

## **ii. English as an Additional Language**

The EAL department offers the following levels of support:

- EAL- I (intensive support)
- EAL- IS (moderate support)
- EAL- SS (strategic support)

To identify students who require EAL support, information about students' linguistic and educational background is collected during the admissions process to gain a better understanding of students' strengths in their home language, English, or any additional language. Students are also interviewed by an EAL specialist to measure oral language proficiency and a writing sample is assessed using the WIDA writing rubric to determine eligibility for EAL support. EAL specialists administer WIDA MODEL Online during the first weeks of school to determine the level of language support each student needs. Any student whose WIDA literacy score is below 4.5 must receive EAL support. Students from grades 9 to 12 are expected to have an adequate level of English language proficiency to access the school curriculum without EAL support.

Students qualify to exit the EAL program when their WIDA literacy score reaches 4.5 or above and they receive recommendations from their homeroom teacher (PYP)/ English teacher (MYP) and their EAL specialist teacher.

## **iii. Counseling**

The MET seeks to identify students in need of additional social/emotional support as early as possible, which may occur through any of the following means:

- existing diagnosis or other information gathered from parents or external healthcare provider;
- historical information obtained during meetings with parents and students;
- observations and referrals made by counselors, classroom teachers, learning support, administrative staff, assistants;



- cause for concern raised by parents;
- self-referral by student.

Should a student require more intensive or long-term support, the counselors may offer third-party referrals.

### **c. External Support Services**

Parents are asked to provide any information about external therapists or agencies that may be working with their child/ren and allow the MET to engage in information sharing freely with the named therapist or agency.

For current students whose needs extend beyond the scope of our support services, The MET may recommend external therapies or interventions. These recommendations are made with the students' best interests in mind, aiming to provide comprehensive support that addresses all aspects of their well-being. We strongly encourage parents to follow through on these recommendations and to provide evidence of their child's engagement with the suggested external services. This collaborative approach ensures that each student receives the necessary support to thrive both academically and personally.

## **IV. Data Protection/Confidentiality**

Student records are confidential and are not shared outside of the school without prior knowledge and consent of the involved student and parents or legal guardians. Information about students' social/emotional circumstances, diagnosis and/or academic needs are shared with teachers strictly on a need-to-know basis, and only when such knowledge is justified in aiding the teacher's understanding of, and approach to teaching a particular student.

## **V. Conclusion**

At The MET, we strive to support all students to reach their personal level of excellence free from discrimination. Our community is inclusive.

## **VI. Appendices**

## Appendix I

### Relevant Legislation and Guidance

#### **PANAMANIAN AND MEDUCA LAWS AND RESOLUTIONS:**

Law 285, February 15, 2022

"That creates the system of guarantees and comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents and dictates other provisions".

*"Que crea el sistema de garantías y protección integral de los derechos de la niñez y la adolescencia y dicta otras disposiciones".*

Law 15 of May 31, 2016

"That reforms Law 42 of 1999, which establishes the equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities".

*"Que reforma la Ley 42 de 1999, que establece la equiparación de oportunidades para las personas con discapacidad".*

Solved 709 February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016

"That creates the program of Outstanding Aptitudes and specific Talents".

*"Que crea el programa de Aptitudes Sobresalientes y Talentos específicos".*

Resolution No. 924 of June 24, 2006

"By which the Individual Educational Program (PEI) is adopted in all public educational centers in the country to promote accessibility and curricular adaptations of students with special educational needs to the contents of learning."

*"Por el cual se adopta en todos los centros educativos públicos del país el Programa Educativo Individual (PEI) para favorecer la accesibilidad y adecuaciones curriculares de los estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales a los contenidos de los aprendizajes".*

Executive Decree No. 1 of February 4, 2000

"by which the regulations for the inclusive education of the population with special educational needs (NEE) are established"

*"por el cual se establece la normativa para la educación inclusiva de la población con necesidades educativas especiales (NEE)"*

Law 42 of August 27, 1999

“By which the equalization of opportunities is established for people with disabilities”.

*“Por la cual se establece la equiparación de oportunidades Para las personas con discapacidad”.*

Political Constitution of the Republic of Panama

1972 Art. 87 - Everyone has the right to education and the responsibility to educate themselves. The State organizes and directs the public service of national education and guarantees parents the right to participate in the educational process of their children. “Toda persona tiene derecho a la educación y la responsabilidad de educarse a sí misma. El Estado organiza y dirige el servicio público de educación nacional y garantiza a los padres el derecho a participar en el proceso educativo de sus hijos”.

### **UNITED NATIONS – CONVENTIONS APPROVED BY PANAMA**

Law No. 25 of July 10, 2007

“By which the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are adopted, adopted in New York, by the General Assembly of the United Nations, on December 13, 2006”.

*“Por la cual se adoptan la Convención sobre los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad y el Protocolo Facultativo de la Convención sobre los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad, adoptados en Nueva York, por la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, el 13 de diciembre de 2006”.*

Law 3 of 2001.

“Inter-american convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities”.

*“Convención interamericana para la eliminación de todas las formas de discriminación contra las personas con discapacidad”.*

Law 15 of November 16, 1990.

“Children's rights convention”.

*“Convención sobre los derechos del niño”.*

Law 15 of october 28, 1977.

“American convention on human rights”.

*“Convención Americana de los Derechos Humanos”.*

“Convention on the fight against discrimination in the field of education”.

“Convención relativa a la lucha contra las discriminaciones en la esfera de la enseñanza”.

## **Appendix II**

### **Documents used to inform the development of this policy**

#### **INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE:**

- Learning diversity and inclusion in IB programmes – Updated May 2020
- Access and Inclusion Policy – Updated November 2022
- Meeting student learning diversity in the classroom – December 2019
- The IB guide to inclusive education: a resource for whole school development – Updated November 2019
- Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the IB Classroom – December 2016

#### **NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION**

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy – August 2020
- NAE EDI Goals