

# Charter School Website Language & Students with Disabilities

Many charter schools serve students with disabilities very well. However, a [review of charter school websites](#) in Colorado conducted by the National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools ([NCSECS](#)) found that many charter school websites could improve their communication to parents of prospective students with disabilities.

The study, which included nearly all Colorado charter schools, found:

- 61 percent lack descriptions of how they enroll students with disabilities;
- 45 percent lack descriptions of how they enroll students overall;
- 63 percent do not describe how they educate students with disabilities;
- 10 percent publish enrollment policies with elements that could be interpreted as exclusionary and did not have any anti-discrimination clauses; and
- 18 percent of application forms ask whether a student has a disability with no anti-discrimination clauses or statements of purpose to help parents understand how information might impact applications.

There are Colorado charter schools and examples nationally that use their websites effectively to communicate with parents of students with disabilities. Strong charter school websites include a concise message affirming their non-discriminatory nature as well as a commitment to enroll and provide services for special populations. Descriptions of programs and enrollment procedures are presented in more detail in linked pages that explain appropriate procedures and do so in a way that does not discourage applicants while accurately explaining their procedures and approach. Websites should also direct interested families to contact the designated school department or staff who are trained and able to handle all questions about special education appropriately.

Accurately and appropriately addressing the specifics of placement decisions, especially for students with moderate to severe needs can be a communication challenge. Addressing these details should not prevent a school from clearly signaling the intent and ability to appropriately serve students with disabilities. This type of scenario may be best addressed in direct communication between families and experts at the school and district.

The following resources were developed to support charter schools, including:

- [Model Charter School Website Language](#)
- [Criterion for Evaluating Charter Websites](#)
- [Examples of Charter School Website Language](#)



*Drafted in collaboration by*  
*Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers (CACSA)*  
*& CLCS's Collaborative for Exceptional Education*



# Model Charter School Website Language

**Introductory Statement.** This should be visible on the front page. Its purpose is to affirm the school's responsibility to not discriminate and to provide special education services

*Insert school name does not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, ancestry, need for special education services, or any other grounds prohibited by law. Insert school name serves students with disabilities and English Learners and provides services to students as required by state and federal law. (Include link to the page where the additional information is posted.)*

**Detailed Statement.** This can be linked from the short statement. Its purpose is to clarify the school's enrollment process for students with disabilities and explain how they determine whether the school can provide FAPE.

## ***Special Education and Services for Special Populations at insert school name***

*Like all charter schools, insert school name, is a public school. Insert school name serves students with disabilities and English Learners and provides services to students as required by state and federal law. Charter schools are subject to all federal and state laws and constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, ancestry, need for special education services, and certain other grounds. Laws applicable to students with disabilities include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).*

*In most cases, the services required by a student with disabilities can be provided at insert school name. In some cases, a student's individual needs require that they be placed in a different program or location as determined by an IEP or Section 504 team. Under IDEA, students with disabilities are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The services a student requires under IDEA are described in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Under Colorado law, the provision of FAPE and specific services required by a student's IEP are a joint responsibility of the charter school and their authorizer, in most cases the local school district.*

*Applicants to insert school name are not required to identify whether the applicant has an IEP and the school admits students without considering a student's disability. After a student with an IEP is initially enrolled in the school, an IEP team meeting may be required to determine whether this school is an appropriate placement for the student based on their needs. In most cases, the services required by a student's IEP can be provided at insert school name. In some circumstances, a student's individual needs require that they be placed in a different program or location. For more information on our programs and services please contact insert title and link to contact or email.*

# Criterion for Evaluating Charter Websites

Charter schools and their authorizers are encouraged to review and update their websites to proactively communicate to parents about their services for students with disabilities. The criteria below combine suggestions from the [Charter School Institute](#) and the [National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools](#).

Charter school website should include the following:

- An anti-discrimination statement on the main page or on the enrollment page of the website.
- Language stating that the school, like all public schools, serves students with disabilities.
- Either a mission statement that includes language indicating the intention to serve all students, or if the mission statement does not indicate an explicit inclusive orientation, a link to the anti-discrimination statement and commitment to serving students with disabilities.
- A clear description of the process for enrolling students in general and for enrolling students with disabilities.
- If the school participates in a centralized, district-administered open enrollment process, a statement explaining the school's participation in the district system and links to the district's relevant website and materials.
- Pre-admission forms (such as intent to enroll forms, and registration forms if there are no web-linked application materials) that only ask for the minimum required information and do not ask about disability status or status as another protected class unless it is for purposes of a weighted lottery or the school is chartered to serve students with a particular disability. If the school uses information on disability status for such purposes, the forms must include statements clarifying the purpose and limited application of such information.

Note: combines material from the: [CSI Checklist](#) & [NCSECS Website Review Questions](#)

# Examples of Charter School Website Language

Many charter schools in Colorado and nationally do an excellent job of addressing issues related to students with disabilities in their websites. These sites accomplish the purposes above clearly and effectively. In addition, some charter schools go further -- by integrating information into their mission statement, or into other statements describing their general approach to schooling, that communicate that welcoming and serving students with disabilities are central priorities for the school that influence all of its design and implementation. Below are examples of strong statements from Colorado and National charter operators.

<b><u>Democracy Prep, National</u></b>	<b>Democracy Prep schools are schools of choice.</b> It is our privilege to educate all scholars regardless of identity, socioeconomic status, religion, citizenship, previous academic record, disability, and intellectual ability. Continue reading to learn how to join the Democracy Prep Family!
<b><u>KIPP, National</u></b>	<b>Enroll at a KIPP School.</b> KIPP schools are tuition-free, public charter schools open to all students. When parent demand exceeds enrollment capacity at a KIPP school, students are admitted based upon a lottery. To enroll your child in a KIPP school, please contact the school in your community directly by phone or email.
<b><u>Monument View Montessori Charter School, Colorado</u></b>	<b>CAN MONTESSORI ACCOMMODATE GIFTED CHILDREN? WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN WITH OTHER SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS?</b>  An advantage of the Montessori approach—including multi-age classrooms with students of varying abilities and interests—is that it allows each child to work at her own pace. Students whose strengths and interests propel them to higher levels of learning can find intellectual challenge without being separated from their peers. The same is true for students who may need extra guidance and support: each can progress through the curriculum at his own comfortable pace, without feeling pressure to “catch up.”  We might note that from a Montessori perspective, every child is considered gifted, each in her own way. For every child has his own unique strengths—it is all a matter of degree.
<b><u>Animas High School, Colorado</u></b>	<b>INCLUSION DEPARTMENT:</b> "Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone." -- George Dei  Welcome to the Animas High School Inclusion Department website, formally known as Exceptional Student Services (ESS). We hope that this term better reflects our shared philosophy that students have better outcomes when they are included in the community with their peers. Research shows that there is

added benefit to the community when we are exposed to the different strengths and challenges of others. Different perspectives push thinking further and enrich the community. As a department, we work with teachers and students to be full members of the general education classroom whenever possible. Through this philosophy, we consider what students need in the immediate-and long-term.

\* Check out "OUR PROGRAMS" for information about enrolling at Animas when your student has a special plan!

### **Animas High School FAQ Entry**

#### **["My student has an IEP and I am thinking about coming to Animas..."](#)**

You DO NOT need to disclose that your student has a disability or what that disability is prior to registering. We do not discriminate enrollment based on special needs, disability, or required services.

Animas High School provides all Special Education services that are required by the state of Colorado.

If it is decided that your student will attend here, you will fill out the registration form. When filling that out, it is imperative to notate that your student has an IEP and with what disability identification (Specific Learning Disability, Autism, Other Health Impairment, Physical, etc.).

Upon completing the registration form a copy of the current IEP and most recent evaluation needs to be submitted. Registration will not be complete until those documents are received. If you are having a difficult time retrieving these documents from your previous school please notify someone in the Inclusion Department (contact information is available in "THE TEAM" tab).

Once those documents are received, the Inclusion Department will review them and reach out if further information is needed or questions arise.

You will then receive communication about setting up a time for a transfer meeting, to review the IEP and determine comparable services. If registration is completed before June 1st, the meeting may take place in the Spring semester. If registration is completed after June 1st, you will receive communication about scheduling a transfer meeting once school begins in the Fall.