Board Policy Equity Lens Tool

Title of board policy being reviewed:

ACA-Americans with Disabilities Act

Describe the purpose of this policy:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure MESD complies with ADA and Section 504 by providing equal access, nondiscrimination, and reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. It establishes expectations for employment practices, communication supports, program accessibility, and a complaint process. It also requires MESD to designate an ADA/504 Coordinator and maintain procedures for resolving accessibility and discrimination concerns promptly.

What is your experience with this policy:

Our experience with this policy is ongoing and foundational. It guides all disability-related accommodations for employees and applicants, and supports compliance with ADA and Section 504. We use it in hiring, workplace accommodations, employee support, building accessibility, and complaint resolution. Requests for accommodations are not uncommon, and the policy provides the framework for evaluating requests, determining reasonable accommodations, and preventing retaliation. HR, supervisors, and program administrators rely on this policy regularly.

What is the plan to communicate this policy to staff, students, and/or families? What is the plan to communicate this policy to linguistically diverse students and their families?Is this policy:

Easy to locate for staff?

This policy and a summary of this policy will be available on the MESD web page. The summary of this policy is also available on the MESD website in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese and, upon request, the summary and/or policy may be translated into other languages.

Accessible to students and families?

This policy and a summary of this policy will be available on the MESD web page. The summary of this policy is also available on the MESD website in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese and, upon request, the summary and/or policy may be translated into other languages.

Included in onboarding, intake, or other training?

Yes, this policy is included in student and staff onboarding materials, student handbooks, intake packets, and annual training to ensure all parties understand student rights, responsibilities, and conduct expectations.

Clear and easy to understand?

Largely yes, but it includes some complex language.
The core expectations are clear—MESD prohibits discrimination, provides accommodations, ensures accessibility, and requires an ADA/504 Coordinator. However, some sentences are long, duplicated (e.g., ADA/504 plan language), or use legal terminology that may be confusing to some readers.

People

How are people affected positively or negatively by the policy? What potential barriers might people encounter? What barriers might be reduced by this policy?

Positive impacts:

- Ensures applicants, employees, and program participants with disabilities receive equal access and nondiscrimination.
- Provides a clear pathway to request reasonable accommodations.
- Protects individuals from retaliation.
- Supports accessible communication through auxiliary aids and services.
- Reinforces MESD's commitment to inclusive practices and environments.

Negative impacts:

- The "undue hardship" and "direct threat" language—though legally required—may feel intimidating or unclear.
- Complex legal terminology may be difficult for some to understand.
- Determinations made by the superintendent/designee may feel opaque if not paired with clear communication.

Potential barriers:

- Some individuals may be hesitant to request accommodations due to stigma or fear of retaliation, despite legal protections.
- Limited understanding of what qualifies as a disability or reasonable accommodation.
- Delays in processing accommodations, depending on workload or clarity of the request.

Barriers reduced:

- Provides formal protection from discrimination.
- Reduces physical, communication, and programmatic barriers by requiring accessible services and facilities.
- Offers a formal complaint process to address concerns promptly.
- Helps normalize accommodations and accessibility as part of MESD operations.

Can you identify the racial or ethnic groups affected by this policy, program, practice, or decision? Do you know the potential impacts to these populations? If you don't know, how will you find out?

The policy applies to all individuals with disabilities regardless of racial or ethnic identity. However, racial and ethnic disparities may intersect with disability access due to:

- Different rates of disability identification across groups.
- Cultural stigma around seeking accommodations.
- Unequal access to healthcare and diagnosis.
- Language barriers affecting understanding of rights and processes.

MESD does not currently have data on racial/ethnic differences in ADA accommodation requests or outcomes. To assess impacts, MESD could review HR accommodation data (where available), analyze complaint trends, and engage employee groups or advisory committees.

Were these populations involved in any way, at any point in the development, implementation, and evaluation of this policy? If so, when and how?

This policy is driven by federal ADA and Section 504 requirements and standard school district practices. Individuals with disabilities or disability advocacy groups were not directly involved in drafting or implementing the policy.

What priorities and commitments are communicated by this policy?

This policy shows MESD's commitment to:

- Equity and nondiscrimination for individuals with disabilities.
- Accessible programs, services, and employment practices.
- Providing reasonable accommodations and communication supports.
- Preventing retaliation.
- Maintaining ADA/504 coordination and a clear complaint process.
- Upholding federal civil rights laws across all MESD operations.

Place

What kind of positive or negative environment are we creating?

What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes? (e.g. mandated, political, emotional, financial, programmatic or managerial)

Positive environment:

- Inclusive, supportive, and legally compliant workplace and school environment.
- Encourages individuals with disabilities to request supports without fear.
- Reinforces accessibility as an organizational priority.

Negative environment:

- Legal-heavy language may feel intimidating.
- "Undue hardship" determinations may feel subjective if not clearly explained.
- Some individuals may still fear stigma despite protections.

Barriers to equitable outcomes include limited understanding of disability rights, the complexity of legal language, cultural stigma associated with requesting

accommodations, and potential delays in the accommodation process. Individuals with disabilities from marginalized racial or ethnic backgrounds may face additional barriers due to language access, different disability identification rates, and hesitancy to engage with formal systems. While the policy establishes strong protections, uneven awareness and comfort with the process may result in inconsistent access to accommodations unless supported by clear communication, training, and proactive outreach.

Power

How is the power of decision-making shared with those it affects?

How have you intentionally involved the communities affected by this policy, program, practice, or decision?

Accommodation determinations and accessibility decisions are made by MESD administrators, the ADA/504 Coordinator, and the superintendent/designee.

Process

Does the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities?

Does it create other unintended consequences?

The policy improves conditions for individuals with disabilities by requiring accommodations and equal access. However, without careful implementation, disparities may be maintained or unintentionally reinforced—especially if individuals feel uncomfortable requesting help, if language access is limited, or if decisions appear inconsistent. Unintended consequences may include individuals not receiving timely accommodations or feeling discouraged by complex procedures.

Plan

How will you reduce the negative impacts and address the barriers?

Negative impacts can be reduced by providing training to staff and supervisors on ADA/504 rights, simplifying communication materials, ensuring language access, and offering clear guidance about how to request accommodations. MESD can further address barriers by monitoring complaint trends, reviewing accommodation timelines, and proactively educating employees and applicants about available supports. Transparent communication from the ADA/504 Coordinator will help build trust and ensure equitable access.