

What is SEED?

As part of the overall [academic recovery plan](#), students with sensory needs can now be supported at one of ten designated Sensory Exploration, Education & Discovery (SEED) sites. This new initiative provides students with disabilities the opportunity to develop and strengthen crucial sensory skills. SEED sites are available to students after school hours Monday-Thursday and on Saturdays. The program will be led by occupational therapists and supported by special education teachers. Each site includes intentionally designed therapeutic spaces, incorporating the use of accessible sensory equipment.

SEED is a unique enrichment-based, sensory movement program offered to students who display intense sensory needs. For some students, this can present in the form of sensory seeking behaviors (e.g., constantly moves or fidgets, is highly distractible, etc.) as they attempt to provide their body with enough sensory input to self-regulate. In contrast, some students may present with a low arousal level and miss information from their environment if their sensory systems are not receiving enough input for their brains to register (e.g., often appears sluggish, doesn't consistently respond to their name or directions, etc.) Others may actively avoid different types of sensory input from their environment (e.g., dislikes touch or noisy/busy areas, etc.) as their nervous system interprets this information as unsafe and may shift into a state of fight/flight or fright where the student becomes unavailable for learning and engagement.

Students participating in the SEED program will have the opportunity, under the supervision of a licensed OT and Special Education teacher, to utilize specialized sensory equipment paired with a social emotional, sensory-based curriculum, to improve sensory regulation. Since there are many different factors that motivate behavior, it is imperative to determine which students present with behaviors specifically driven by intense sensory needs having direct impact on their academic and social-emotional learning for them to fully benefit from the SEED program.

Student Eligibility Criteria

Deficits in sensory integration can pose challenges in performing activities of daily living (ADLs), in addition to development, learning, playing, working, socializing, and exhibiting appropriate behavior. **When the school community is collaborating to identify students who would most benefit from SEED participation, the following factors should be considered:**

- Student has a current IEP recommending occupational therapy services
- Student is enrolled in PreK-8 grade
- Student demonstrates difficulty with sensory regulation (ability to manage emotions and behavior in accordance with the demands of the environment/situation).

- Student is sensitive to sensory information (over-responding) to the point where student's ability to complete academic tasks and/or demonstrate appropriate social-emotional learning is impacted.
 - *A student who is over-responsive to sensory input often has difficulty in selecting and attending to important input in the environment and filtering out background input. In the classroom, this student may be very aware of all noises (e.g., the hum of the computer, the whispers of other students, pages turning, cars outside) and cannot focus on the teacher's voice. This student may also be very aware of smells in the room, all the visual stimulation on display boards and the feeling of his/her school uniform, leading to distractibility and frequently leading to feelings of sensory overload and anxiety. Common indicators of over-responsiveness are:*
 - *Defensiveness e.g., pushing someone who is standing too close*
 - *Avoidance e.g., running out of the classroom, hiding in a corner of the playground*
 - *Easily upset*
 - *Anxiety*
 - *Distractibility*
 - *Sensory overload, sometimes leading the child to 'shut down' and block out all input*
 - *May engage in disruptive behaviors to get removed from the situation which is causing sensory overload and distress*
 - *Avoids close physical proximity to others*

- Student is slow to notice sensory information (under-responding) to the point where student's ability to complete academic tasks and/or demonstrate appropriate social-emotional learning is impacted. *May also present with sensory seeking or craving behaviors as seen below.
 - *A student who is under-responsive to sensory input is not registering adequate amounts of sensory input, and subsequently the brain is not alert enough for interaction, learning and engagement. This student is filtering out too much sensory input and therefore needs a higher intensity or different type of sensory stimulation to increase alertness and engagement. There are often two types of behaviors observed in the under-responsive student:*
 1. *Low registration (passive coping strategy)*

The student is not registering adequate sensory input and may present as follows:

 - *Disengaged and disinterested in activities, especially more passive activities such as sitting at a desk to listen/read/write*
 - *Appears lethargic*
 - *Slow processing of information*
 - *Delayed or no response to questions and instructions*
 - *Difficulty completing work*
 - *Becomes more alert and engaged in more active tasks and multisensory activities e.g., P.E., playground, Art, Music.*

2. Sensory seeking (active coping strategy)

A sensory seeking student is often under-responsive to sensory input and attempts to improve alertness by seeking increased sensory stimulation or opportunities from their environment such as:

- *Frequently standing or moving around the classroom instead of sitting*
 - *Swinging in chair*
 - *Enjoying fast movement*
 - *Frequently fidgeting*
 - *Frequently touching objects and people*
 - *Likes to hold a fidget object*
 - *Sniffing objects and people*
 - *Making noise in quiet environments e.g., Assembly, independent work time, exam hall*
 - *Enjoying 'rough and tumble' play*
- Student has difficulty planning and organizing their movements (dyspraxia), to the point where it impacts school function and participation. Common indicators of dyspraxia include:
 - *Poor muscle strength (especially core): Students with dyspraxia may slouch, slump, slide out of their chairs, or lean because they lack the core strength that many of their peers have. As they grow, they do not gain that strength naturally, and just sitting up all day can be exhausting. They may be more likely to fall as the day goes on. Poor muscle strength is not just in the core: Students with dyspraxia may have trouble with fine motor skills because they lack the hand strength to grip a pencil or crayon, complete simple ADL skills (zippering, buttons, fasteners) and doing so for extended periods of time is exhausting for them.*
 - *Clumsiness: We may not realize how many small muscle movements we make in carrying out simple tasks like putting papers in a three-ring binder or packing a backpack. For most kids, two or three tries are sufficient to get the hang of these skills, and once achieved, they are in place for life. For students with dyspraxia, it takes many more attempts to learn these skills.*
 - *Poor executive function: It is common for students with dyspraxia to have difficulty tracking instructions, particularly ones with multiple steps. Managing materials, getting, and staying organized, planning—all are particularly challenging for these students.*
 - *Social and behavioral difficulties: Students with dyspraxia can get frustrated and may act out as a result. And the combination of exhaustion, inability to keep track of materials, and lack of skills that their peers attain more easily—skipping, running, catching, or throwing a ball, riding a bike—makes students with dyspraxia visible and easy targets for bullies.*
 - Student has difficulty tolerating transitions or changes in routines, plans, and expectations to the point where it impacts school function and participation.

- Student perseverates to the point that they cannot move on (i.e., can't shift gears), and therefore 'gets stuck' on one task/activity.
- Student withdraws when there are changes in the environment or routine and displays significant difficulty reengaging back into classroom activities/socialization.
- Student handles frustration with outbursts or challenging behavior and displays significant difficulty reengaging back into classroom activities/socialization.
- Student has difficulty participating in group settings; turn taking, cooperating, supporting peers; making and/or maintaining friendships.
- Group work can often be difficult due to the following challenges:
 - Student may disengage or have meltdowns when they are overwhelmed by the group dynamic
 - Can be distracted by background noises that others do not seem to hear
 - May have trouble knowing where their body is in relation to other objects or people thus, getting too close to others in the group which may make them uncomfortable (personal space)
 - May have a constant need to touch people or objects even when it is not socially acceptable
 - May be very fidgety and unable to sit still

Students who exhibit several of the criteria listed above may benefit from participation in the SEED program to support their sensory needs resulting in improved academic and social-emotional school-based functioning.

What happens next?

If the school community believes a student is a good candidate for the SEED program:

Schools will share the **SEED Enrollment Program Survey** with families of identified students. Families who respond to the survey, indicating they agree to their child's enrollment in SEED, will be scheduled for SEED by the Office of Related Services (ORS), within the Special Education Office. ORS will share finalized SEED enrollment/schedules with student's school administration, allowing schools to ensure SEED enrollment is included in the student's Special Education Recovery Services parent notice, along with any other Special Education Recovery Services the student is being offered.

For additional information, or should your school have clinical questions regarding student selection, please contact your district's [Occupational Therapy Supervisor](#) or relatedservices@schools.nyc.gov

School administrators can access the SEED Administrator's Information here: [SEED Site Administrator Information](#)