
HIGHLANDER
ACADEMY

Several characteristics distinguish Highlander Academy from traditional self-contained or private out-of-district programs

Highlander Academy represents a unique model of therapeutic special education programming that combines the intensive supports of a self-contained Emotional Regulation Impairment (ERI) program with the opportunities and resources available through a comprehensive public school district. Rather than functioning solely as a separate placement, the program is intentionally designed to help students develop the academic, behavioral, emotional, and social skills necessary to increase independence and successfully participate in less restrictive educational settings whenever appropriate.

The "Best of Both Worlds" Model

Highlander Academy operates as an off-site therapeutic program while remaining an integral part of West Milford High School.

- **Home District Benefits:** Students access district resources, curriculum, and personnel.
- **Continuity of Service:** Prevents separation from the home school community often found in private placements.
- **Transition Strength:** Clinical and educational staff work together to facilitate gradual increases in general education participation.

Compliance with Least Restrictive Environment

NJAC 6A: 14-14.2 Standards

Highlander Academy provides a therapeutic self-contained setting only when a less restrictive placement cannot be satisfactorily achieved with supplementary aids and services.

Intensive Support

Focuses on behavioral, emotional, and academic needs.

Continuous Evaluation

Regular monitoring of student progress toward increased independence.

Annual Review

Placement is revisited yearly through the IEP process.

Goal-Oriented

Designed to stabilize students and prepare them for increased participation in general education.

Whole-Child Wellness

Highlander Academy intentionally integrates wellness into the school culture to support emotional, physical, and academic success:

- Daily community-building and emotional regulation activities.
- Physical activity and programming supporting self-regulation and stress management.
- Trauma-informed and relationship-centered educational practices.
- A safe, predictable, and supportive environment promoting resilience and self-advocacy.

Collaborative Team

Student success is driven by comprehensive, ongoing collaboration among key stakeholders:

- Special Education Teachers
- School Social Workers
- Behavior Specialists
- Related Service Providers
- School Administration & Families
- Sending School Districts

Alignment with N.J.A.C. 6A:14

Continuum of Services for Emotional Regulation Impairments

The Highlander Academy secondary ERI program provides a compliant continuum of special education services. It ensures targeted, flexible instruction and least restrictive environment options tailored to unique student needs.

Core Legal and Program Foundations

1

LRE Mandate

Mandates education with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

2

Continuum

Offers comprehensive alternative placements and program options under **N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.3** and **4.6**.

3

ERI Requirements

Delivers specialized replacement or in-class resource instruction via certified special education personnel.

4

Individualized Goals

Aligns all modifications directly to student **IEPs** and New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

Ensuring Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Highlander Academy Program Foundations and Special Education Commitments

FAPE Program Components

1

In-District Setting

A self-contained special education program within the West Milford Township School District.

2

Target Population

Students whose IEPs identify a need for a therapeutic educational setting due to Emotional Regulation Impairment (ERI), Other Health Impaired (OHI), or similar disabilties.

3

Core Mandate

Provides specialized instruction, behavioral supports, and therapeutic interventions to ensure a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

4

Compliance

Placement is determined via the IEP process based on individual needs, consistent with N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.5(c)5.

Meaningful Access to Nondisabled Peers

Students maintain connections to Macopin and
West Milford High School through individualized inclusion:

Inclusionary Opportunities

- **Academic & Electives**
- **Social & Community**
- **Extracurriculars**

Examples of Participation

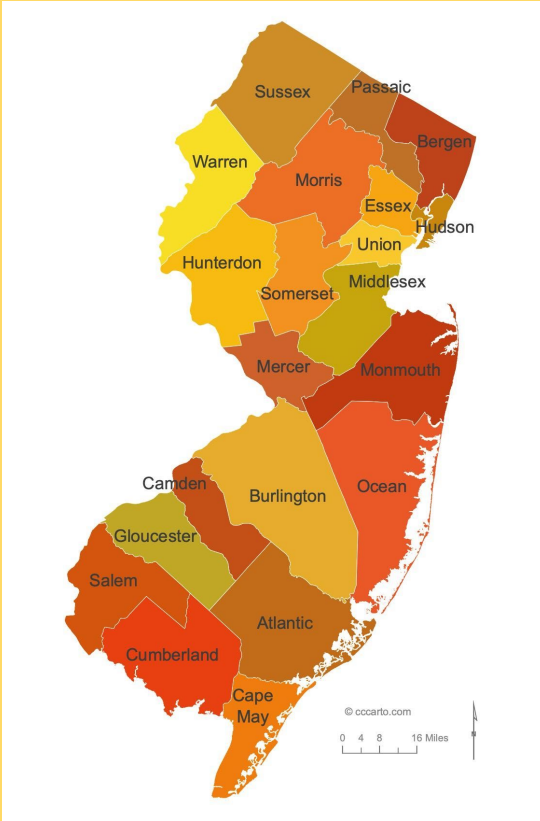
- General education courses, Electives, Career & Technical Education
- School assemblies, Lunch periods, Clubs, and School events
- Sports and district-wide activities

Regional Resource for Northern New Jersey Districts

Highlander Academy expands the continuum of public special education services available throughout the region.

Given the limited availability of public self-contained ERI programs in northern Passaic County and surrounding communities, the program provides neighboring districts with access to a high-quality therapeutic educational option while preserving opportunities for inclusion, public school participation, and transition planning.

By combining individualized instruction, comprehensive therapeutic services, school-wide behavioral supports, wellness programming, and authentic opportunities for inclusion, Highlander Academy exemplifies the intent of **N.J.A.C. 6A:14**. The program provides students with Emotional Regulation Impairments the specialized supports they require.



A Public Option for Passaic County

Highlander Academy expands educational opportunities for the northern "up county" region of Passaic County and neighboring communities.

Regional Need

Addresses the limited number of public self-contained programs for ERI in surrounding communities.

Collaborative Agreements

Accessible to neighboring districts through tuition or shared-service arrangements.

Alternative Option

Offers a public school setting that maintains high-level therapeutic programming.

Advantages of the Regional Model

Why Highlander Academy is a Less Restrictive Alternative

- **Public School Environment:** Students remain educated within a New Jersey public school environment, maintaining their student rights to a FAPE as well as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).
- **Curriculum & Programming:** Access to standard public school curriculum and programming.
- **Peer Interaction:** Maintained opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers.
- **Transition Planning:** Coordinated transition planning back to less restrictive settings.
- **Reduced Private Reliance:** Reduced reliance on private special education schools.

School-Wide PBIS

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

The program implements a proactive framework specifically designed for students with ERI:

- **Skill Development:** Explicit instruction in emotional regulation and social-emotional learning (SEL).
- **Management:** Self-management instruction and coping strategy development.
- **Culture:** Restorative practices and incentive-based behavioral systems.
- **Data-Driven:** Behavioral decisions are based on objective data and collaboration between teachers, social workers, and families.

Essential Related Services

Integrated Clinical Support

Counseling services are fundamental to the Highlander Academy model, delivered by certified school social workers

- **Clinical Intervention:** Individual and group counseling; crisis intervention.
- **Collaborative Support:** Family collaboration and consultation with teachers.
- **Instructional Integration:** Social skills instruction and behavioral problem-solving integrated throughout the school day.
- **IEP Alignment:** Services are provided as identified within each student's Individualized Education Program.

Program Outcomes

Fulfilling the Intent of N.J.A.C. 6A:14

Highlander Academy strengthens the continuum of public special education services by providing:

- **FAPE:** Individualized programming based on IEP team decisions.
- **LRE:** Access to a continuum of placement options that prioritize inclusion.
- **Stability:** Comprehensive behavioral and therapeutic supports.
- **Community:** Stronger connections to the home school district and reduced reliance on private out-of-district placements.

Four Core Program Pillars

Highlander Academy's comprehensive approach to therapeutic special education

Therapeutic Public School Model

- In-district therapeutic special education program within WMTSD.
- Maintains students in the NJ public system with intensive supports.
- Reduces reliance on private out-of-district placements.

Least Restrictive Environment

- Individualized shared-time opportunities with Middle & High School.
- General education academics, electives, and extracurriculars.
- Ongoing transition planning toward less restrictive settings.

Comprehensive Therapy

- Daily access to certified school social workers for individual/group care.
- Embedded behavioral support across the entire school day.
- Therapeutic interventions integrated directly into class programming.

Positive Behavior (PBIS)

- Consistent school-wide behavioral expectations.
- Explicit instruction in coping, regulation, and SEL.
- Individualized behavior intervention planning.
- Positive reinforcement to encourage growth.