



Policy for Reasonable Accommodation of Qualified Students with Disabilities

Mission of Massachusetts State Science & Engineering Fair, Inc. (“MSSEF”)

MSSEF is committed to increasing awareness of, exposure to, and participation in inquiry-based learning through the development of science and engineering projects by middle school and high school students, and to showcase and celebrate that learning.

I. Policy Statement

MSSEF prohibits unlawful discrimination against qualified students with disabilities and encourages their full participation in the Massachusetts State Science & Engineering Fair (“Science Fair”). MSSEF is dedicated to actively providing support for qualified students with disabilities at all MSSEF educational programs, services and activities.

a. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

- Qualified student with disability means any student or applicant to MSSEF (a) who has a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or has a record of such disability, or is regarded as having such a disability, and (b) who meets the academic and technical standards requisite for participation in the Science Fair. *Qualified students who pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others will not be allowed to participate in or benefit from services, benefits, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of MSSEF. Conditions such as kleptomania, pyromania, and *current* users of illegal drugs and abusers of alcohol are excluded from the definition of an individual with a disability under the ADA
- Physical impairment means any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more body system. Examples of body systems include, but are not limited to, neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory, speech organs, cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, lymphatic and endocrine. Conditions such as visual or hearing impairments, paraplegia, quadriplegia, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, and arthritis would be considered physical impairments.
- Mental impairment means any mental or psychological disorder. Examples include, but are not limited to mental retardation, emotional or mental illness, organic brain syndrome, and specific learning disabilities.

- Major life activity means functions central to daily life. Examples include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, sitting, standing, lifting, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, thinking, learning, and working.
- Readily achievable means easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense. In determining whether an accommodation is readily achievable, factors to be considered include:
 - 1) The nature and cost of the accommodation needed under the ADA;
 - 2) The overall financial resources of MSSEF; the number of persons employed at MSSEF; the effect on expenses and resources or the impact otherwise of such accommodation on the operation of MSSEF; and
 - 3) The type of operation or operations of MSSEF, including, the composition, structure and functions of the workforce, the geographic separateness, and the administrative or fiscal relationship of the facility or facilities in question to MSSEF.
- Undue burden means an action requiring significant difficulty or expense, one that is unduly costly, extensive, substantial, disruptive, or that will fundamentally alter the nature of the services.
- Direct threat means that there is a significant risk to health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by a modification of policies, practices, or procedures, or by the provision of auxiliary aides or services.

II. **Physical Accessibility**

All MSSEF buildings and facilities are to be accessible to the extent that a barrier removal is readily achievable. In situations where a particular Science Fair is scheduled in a location that is inaccessible to a qualified student with a disability, the event or service will relocate to an accessible location so as not to deny access unless relocation is not practicable or causes an undue burden. The qualified student is responsible for making accessibility needs known to MSSEF far enough in advance to allow reasonable time for Science Fair relocation. Requests for accessible space should be made to the MSSEF Operating Committee.

III. **MSSEF Science Fairs**

Any Science Fair available to the general student population will also be made available to qualified students with disabilities if practicable unless the availability of the Science Fair causes an undue burden or will fundamentally alter the nature of the Science Fair.

An accommodation will be provided so long as the request does not cause an undue burden and does not pose a direct threat, and is made by the qualified student (or, in the case of a minor, by the qualified

student's parent or legal guardian) in sufficient time for the accommodation(s) to be arranged within the given time constraints. A request will ordinarily be considered timely if received a minimum of (one week) prior to the scheduled Science Fair. If necessary, MSSEF Operating Committee will make the determination as to whether a request is timely and does not cause an undue burden. If the request is found not to be readily achievable, the decision can be appealed to (MSSEF Board).

a. Admission to Science Fair

Qualified students with disabilities may not, unlawfully on the basis of a disability, be denied admission or be subjected to unlawful discrimination in admission activities. Limitations may not be placed on the number or proportion of qualified students with disabilities who may be admitted to the Science Fair. Admission requirements that can be demonstrated as essential to the integrity of the Science Fair, or to the MSSEF mission, will not be considered unlawfully discriminatory within the confines of the policy.

b. Post Admission Inquiry

After a student has received notification of admittance to the Science Fair, MSSEF may inquire into the existence of a disability. Upon the student's voluntary disclosure of a disability, additional information will be requested as to the qualified student's need for specific accommodations. All information will be kept confidential on a need to know basis.

c. Alternative Forms of Admission Criteria

Alternative forms of admission criteria are an option that MSSEF may consider to assure reasonable admission opportunity in individual cases where the disability has had a direct disproportionately adverse effect on the applicant's ability to meet the qualifications for the Science Fair.

d. Auxiliary Aids

MSSEF will provide qualified students with disabilities access to the appropriate auxiliary aids necessary to allow reasonable participation in the MSSEF Science Fair unless it imposes an undue burden or fundamentally alters the nature of the services or activity in a way that interferes with the integrity of the Science Fair. Auxiliary aids include services, adaptive equipment, or other educational assistance that enables the qualified student with a disability to participate in or benefit from the Science Fair. Auxiliary aids may include, but are not limited to, readers, sign language interpreters, and special equipment. MSSEF does not provide personal attendant care.

IV. Responsibility for Identification and Request for Disability Services

It is the responsibility of the qualified student with a disability to voluntarily and confidentially disclose information regarding the nature and extent of the disability to the MSSEF Operating Committee when requesting accommodations. The MSSEF Operating Committee will assist the qualified student in determining which personnel should be aware of the disability. The MSSEF Operating Committee will assist the qualified student in identifying potential accommodations based

upon the qualified student's needs, preferences, and available resources. Although every effort will be made to provide qualified students with requested accommodations, MSSEF does not guarantee that a qualified student will automatically receive his or her first choice accommodations and reserves the right to make the final decision on which accommodations will be provided.

It is the responsibility of the qualified student with a disability to provide appropriate medical documentation of the nature and extent of the disability and the need for specific services or accommodations to the MSSEF Operating Committee. It is the responsibility of the qualified student to cover any costs associated with acquiring the appropriate medical documentation. If the MSSEF Operating Committee has reason to doubt the validity of the medical documentation, they may require, at their own expense, the reexamination of the qualified student and/or his/her documentation by a service provider designated or approved by MSSEF. All documentation related to a qualified student's disability will be maintained in separate locked files and treated as confidential medical records by MSSEF. MSSEF does not assume responsibility for providing special accommodations and services to qualified students with disabilities who have not identified themselves as having a disability and who have not made their needs known.

V. **Process for Identification and Complaint**

Qualified students with disabilities are expected to follow standard procedures for requesting and acquiring services relative to a disability. Standard procedures will include:

- A clearly written request to the MSSEF Operating Committee for a specific accommodation attempt prior to the Science Fair.
- Unless otherwise stated, the MSSEF Operating Committee will respond to a written request within one week (7 days).
- Request for additional accommodations will be made to the MSSEF Operating Committee as soon as possible, but at least one week prior to the actual need for accommodation.
- It is the responsibility of the qualified student requesting the accommodation to follow up with the MSSEF Operating Committee to ensure the accommodation is provided in a timely manner.
- In the event the MSSEF Operating Committee denies an accommodation, the qualified student may request a joint review of the by the (Committee). Findings and recommendations will be forwarded to the (Board) for a final decision and recommendation for action.

Please submit all qualified student accommodation requests to:

Massachusetts State Science & Engineering Fair
Attention: MSSEF President
950 Massachusetts Avenue - #350
Cambridge, MA 02139