

Understanding Special Education

Special Education laws are complex.

This guide explains access to special education and the services and supports school systems are required to provide.

Who is eligible for special education services?

Children are eligible for special education services if testing reveals that they fall into one of a range of categories, which include:

- intellectual disability
- specific learning disability
- multiple disabilities
- "other health impaired"
- autism
- emotional disturbance
- specific physiological categories such as deafness or blindness
- significant neurological and cognitive impairments

To be eligible for special education services from ages 3 through 21:

- child must be classified in one of the categories above
- the disability must "adversely affect the child's educational performance"

How does a child become eligible to receive special education services?

School districts are required to identify children who have a suspected disability. Identification can be done by a teacher, parent, medical provider, etc.

Once the child is identified, the school must complete an evaluation of the child and convene a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting.

The evaluation should consider:

- whether the child has a disability
- child's current level of performance and educational need
- need for special education and related services
- where services can be provided – regular classroom or alternative placement



What do special education services include?

Special Education services can include:

- specifically-designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the child
- related services such as physical therapy, speech therapy, social work services, paraprofessional support
- transportation

Can a child receive special education services during the summer?

Children receiving special education services may be eligible for "extended school year" (ESY) services.

Can special education services be provided anyplace other than public school?

Special education services must be provided in whatever setting is appropriate for the child. This includes:

- child's classroom
- out-of-district placement
- magnet or charter schools
- home – if child is receiving homebound instruction
- hospital – for child who is eligible for inpatient tutoring

Provision of special ed services is the responsibility of the school system where the child resides. (continued)



What are the steps to access special education services?

1. Child is evaluated by school
2. School convenes PPT (teachers, administrators, parents, other support staff)
3. PPT reviews evaluations and determines special education eligibility
4. If eligible, PPT develops Individualized Education Plan (IEP) including goals and objectives, based on specific needs of the child

What is “least restrictive environment”?

School systems are required to educate children with disabilities in the “least restrictive environment” (educated with non-disabled peers) whenever possible.

A child who cannot access his/her education in a regular education setting must be placed in a therapeutic school that meets the child’s needs. The school system must pay for this school.

What if the parent feels that the special education services or placement are inappropriate?

Parents who disagree with educational services or supports can appeal to the State Department of Education.

Important to Note

- School cannot refuse to provide service just because administrative personnel are not at PPT meeting
- Special education is based on the needs of the child and not on school district policy (eg: paraprofessional must be provided if PPT recommends)
- Expense is not a basis for denial of service

The PPT determines the appropriate educational placement for the child.

Special Education Resources

Connecticut State Department of Education
(860) 713-5000

Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy
for Persons with Disabilities
(860) 297-4300

SpEd Connecticut
(860) 560-1711

211 INFOLINE

Center for Children’s Advocacy Medical-Legal Partnership Project

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