

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT HANDBOOK



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Denver Public Schools

Division of Student Services

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Parent Handbook on Special Education

Welcome

The Denver Public Schools Department of Special Education is committed to providing a quality educational experience based upon the individual needs of each child. Special education services provides specialized instruction for students to minimize the impact of their disability through a continuum of services, ranging from services provided in the general education classroom to fully contained classroom settings. In addition to special education teachers, students with disabilities may receive support from paraprofessional, nurses, school psychologists, social workers, speech language and motor therapists. The goal of the Department of Special Education is to provide services that will allow students with disabilities to acquire the skills to pursue independent living and post-secondary success.

This handbook has been created to help you understand more about the educational language and acronyms used in the special education process. Often, during meetings, many of these acronyms are used frequently, and it is assumed that everyone is familiar with the meanings. In order to help with any confusion, we have included in this booklet frequently used terms and definitions, as well as an acronym glossary.

We hope this book will empower you with the information and support you need to help your child.

Laws Governing Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA governs how the Department of Special Education provides special education services. IDEA is the most comprehensive federal law regarding special education. According to this law, students with disabilities have a number of basic rights. The most significant rights are:

A Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Denver Public Schools is responsible for providing a free and appropriate public education to all students with disabilities. These services are available on the child's third (3rd) birthday and may continue through age 21.

Educational Services in the Least-Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Least restrictive environment (LRE) means that your child will be educated with typical peers as much as possible, while still meeting the goals of the IEP.

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Instructional and Support Services and Supplementary Aids.

These services may include, but are not limited to physical and occupational therapy, social and emotional health, speech therapy, assistive technology, transportation, adaptive equipment, and are determined by your child's individual needs.

Assessment Procedures

Educational assessment (or evaluation) is conducted to identify your child's learning needs and to determine whether your child requires special education and related services. If it is determined that your child is eligible for special education services, the district will then make an offer of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), describing the specially designed instruction and related services that are required to support your child in accessing common core state standards. Assessments and a review of data must be conducted before your child is placed in special education. A re-evaluation to determine eligibility must occur at least every three years following your child's placement. Parents and/or teachers may request assessment at more frequent intervals.

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Plan for your child.

Developed by a team that describes how your child is currently performing, the needs of your child, the goals that they will be working toward and the services they will receive.

Due Process

Due Process assures you the right to be involved in educational decisions about your child including an appeal process to challenge decisions with which you may disagree.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA provides privacy safeguards to all parents, legal guardians and students. It forbids the release of a student's records or personally identifiable information to unauthorized persons, but does not bar the disclosure of "directory information."

IDEA incorporates the provisions of FERPA. In addition to the protections offered by FERPA, IDEA prohibits DPS from releasing information to unauthorized persons regarding your child's disability, or the fact that your child is disabled, without your consent. Both FERPA and IDEA permit the release of educational information to public school districts in which your child is enrolled or intends to enroll without your consent. The receiving school district is bound by the same

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confidentiality requirements under these laws.

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 is a civil rights act that protects the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. It applies to any agency receiving federal funds. While IDEA lists specific categories of disability, Section 504 defines a disability as a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Section 504 provides for a free, appropriate education in the least-restrictive environment, with reasonable accommodations, and a written plan describing how these accommodations will be provided. This act is enforced by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

Key Components of the Special Education Process

How Does A Preschool Student Qualify For Special Education Services?

There are several steps to be completed and criteria to be met before a student begins to receive services.

Preschool Child Find

DPS has professionals who are trained to evaluate preschool children in a variety of areas, including cognitive functioning, physical functioning, hearing and vision, speech and language and social and emotional development. This service is referred to as Child Find. Evaluations are conducted by the Preschool Child Find team at no cost to parents. Once the child find evaluation team, which includes the parents, has gathered sufficient information used to determine a child's eligibility for early intervention or preschool special education services, an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP – birth to three years of age) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP – three to five years of age) is developed and services can begin.

Children under the age of six may be referred at any time for an eligibility determination for early intervention (age's birth through three) or

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preschool special education services (age's three through five).

DPS provides individualized preschool special education services for eligible children, three to five years of age.

Special Education Services

The Preschool Child Find process includes formal assessment for the identification of a disability. An Individualized Educational Program (IEP) Team will be formed to guide the process and may determine that your child needs special education and related services. Special education is specialized instruction for your child to minimize the impact of his/her disability through a continuum of services, ranging from services provided in the general education classroom to fully contained classroom settings.

Prior to Consideration for special education services

When an educational concern has been identified, your child's general education teacher will consult with the Student Intervention Team (SIT team). The SIT team may include a counselor, teachers, school psychologist, speech pathologist and professionals who may have expertise on the needs of your child. This team will identify and implement a variety of intervention strategies, referred to as Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), with your child. The results of the intervention's effectiveness will be shared with you prior to making a decision about evaluation

Interventions are designed to teach specific skills to your student in the areas of concern. (RtI).

Review by Student Intervention Team (SITeam)

The Student Intervention Team reviews the information and data that has been collected on the interventions/instruction that has been provided to your child. This is to check if the intervention strategies have successfully addressed the concern(s). If not, an additional meeting may be held to determine what additional supports may be put in place for your child. Many students who are referred to the SITeam are not referred for a special education evaluation if the concerns can be addressed with

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supports provided within the general education setting.

Review by the IEP Team

The IEP Team reviews the information gathered through the intervention process to learn about the specific needs of your child and if the needs rise to the level of potentially needing special education and related services.

Referral to IEP Team

If the school staff feels that your child should be considered for needing special education and related services, then an IEP team meeting will be scheduled. You will be invited as a member of the IEP team. Your written consent is required prior to proceeding with any further assessment.

The team has 60 calendar days to complete the evaluation. The plan for evaluation is discussed with you at the time you provide your written consent.

Eligibility IEP Meeting

At the eligibility IEP meeting, each member of the IEP team provides input on your child's current levels of performance and needs.

Development of Individualized Education Program (IEP)

What is an IEP?

An IEP – or Individualized Education Plan – is a term used to describe the official document of special education services that will be provided for your child. Here are some key points to help you become more familiar with an IEP.

The IEP has a number of purposes and functions

The IEP team meeting serves as an opportunity to jointly decide what your child's needs are, what services will be provided to meet those needs, and what the anticipated outcomes may be.

The IEP process provides an opportunity for resolving any differences between you and the school concerning the special education needs of your child; first, through the IEP meeting, and second, if necessary, through the procedural protections that are available to you.

The IEP sets forth in writing a commitment to provide services and resources necessary to enable your child to receive needed special education services.

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You will receive a Prior Written Notice before an IEP is implemented or changed.

Who's on the IEP team?

Those who will participate in the meeting should include:

- You as the parent
- At least one general education teacher of your child
- At least one special education teacher
- A representative of the district who is knowledgeable about resources and curriculum of the district (he/she can be the special education teacher). This person serves in the role of Special Education Director Designee.
- An individual to interpret instructional implications of evaluation results
- Other individuals who have knowledge or expertise regarding your child, at the discretion of you or Denver Public Schools
- Your child, if appropriate (required at age of 16 and older)
- During transition planning, representatives of other agencies needed to plan for your child's future

Present Level Of Performance (PLOP)

This section includes the following information:

- Short-term and long-term vision for your student
- Strengths and personal interests of your student
- Concerns regarding educational performance
- Progress towards past goals
- A summary of the most recent evaluation or re-evaluation results

Consideration of Special Factors

The IEP development process contains specific considerations that are both state and federal requirements. These items need to be addressed within the IEP document and must be considered annually. They are:

- Needs of students who are blind or visually impaired
- Needs of students who are deaf or hearing impaired
- Needs of students who exhibit behaviors that impede learning or the learning of others
- Needs of students with limited English proficiency
- Student's need for assistive technology devices and/or services
- Needs of students with physical or health impairments

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- Needs of students for specialized transportation

objectives, or subtasks, required to reach each goal.

IEP Goal(s) with Objectives/Benchmarks

Based on the present level of performance, the next step of the IEP meeting is to develop, or review and revise a written statement about your student's educational needs and determine annual goals. The goals provide the compass that guides the IEP Team's decision making.

When writing goals for students, there should be a direct correspondence between present levels of performance, identified needs, and annual goals that allow the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum. Goals should not be written verbatim from the academic standards, but should reflect consideration of the Colorado State Learning Standards. The standard is listed after the annual goal has been written.

A well written goal has the following features:

- S-Strategic and Specific
- M- Measurable
- A-Attainable
- R-Results-Driven
- T- Time Bound.

In addition to annual goals, your child's IEP will have measurable

Reporting Progress

The IEP notes how often progress will be reported towards the goals to parents. At a minimum, progress reports will be updated each time you receive your child's report card.

Services Summary

This outlines the details of anything that is needed to fulfill the IEP goals. It includes the minutes, frequency and location of special education services, as well as the beginning and ending dates of services.

Also includes information about any related services, supplementary aids, program modifications and accommodations that are required to accomplish the IEP goals. The Services Summary also includes any supports school personnel may need to implement the IEP.

Placement Options

Following the completion of your child's IEP, the IEP team will make a placement recommendation. The placement decision is based on your child's needs and takes several factors into consideration, including your child's placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Your child will be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with children without disabilities. The IEP team must first consider if your child can remain in the general education classroom and achieve the IEP goals with the help of supplementary aids and services. If the team agrees this cannot be achieved satisfactorily, the team then must decide the route that will allow your child opportunities to be integrated with peers without disabilities as close to his or her home school as possible.

Considerations for removing a child from a general education classroom

The nature or severity of your child's disability is such that his or her education in the general education class, with the use of supplementary aids and services, cannot be achieved satisfactorily

Questions to consider:

- Can your student receive the individually determined services in the general education classroom?
- Can your student achieve his or her IEP goals in the general education classroom?

- Does the IEP provide all necessary supplementary aids and services?
- What nonacademic benefits are available to your student from interacting with non-disabled peers?
- Is it possible for the student to access the general education curriculum and meet annual goals in the general education classes for all or some of the school day?
- Would the student require so much of the general education teacher's time that the teacher cannot give adequate attention to the needs of other students in the classroom?
- Is the student so disruptive in the general education classroom that the education of your student or other students is significantly impaired?
- Does the student require the curriculum to be modified so significantly that it bears little relation to the instruction in the classroom?
- What are the potential effects, both positive and negative, of the placement options being considered?

What is a re-evaluation?

A re-evaluation is required every three years to determine if your child

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continues to require special education services. This re-evaluation may be completed with or without additional testing. The IEP team, of which you are a part, must review existing data to identify if any additional testing is needed to confirm eligibility for special education.

Formal testing is not required if there is enough information to confirm eligibility of your child for services and meet his/her educational needs. If additional testing is necessary, based on the review of existing data, your consent must be obtained.

An IEP meeting is held to review the results of the data gathered through the re-evaluation process. Any additional decisions regarding support for your child are made at this time.

Checklist on what to bring to the IEP meeting:

- Goals you have for the coming year —A list of questions about any concerns
- Examples of strategies and interventions that have and have not worked
- Willingness to partner with the IEP team through mutual respect.
- Any documentation of additional reports, assessments, or data

Tips

After the IEP meeting, here are a few things you can do to help ensure your child's success throughout the year.

- Maintain general contact with your child's teacher.
- Ask for suggestions on how you can practice and reinforce what is going on in school.
- Continue to keep good records.
- During the year, keep a list of anything you want to consider for your child's next IEP.
- If you think teachers or other team members are doing a good job, then let them know.
- If you have discovered hints that help your child learn, then share them. Remember that other people such as school bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers and secretaries may help your child in informal ways.
- Get involved in your child's school. Join the PTA/PTO; go to school events and other activities. Go over your child's IEP every few months. Are the services written in the IEP being provided? Is progress being reported to you? Does your child seem more successful in school? If there appears to be a problem, ask for a meeting of all the people involved.

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- Talk with your child's teacher if you have any questions or if there are any problems.
- Participate in training sessions or workshops offered by the school district or other community agencies.
- Find out who the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) representative is for your school's region. He or she should be able to help you with questions and networking within your school.

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GLOSSARY OF ACROYNMS

ADA	Americans with Disability Act
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AN	Affective Needs
APE	Adapted Physical Education
ASL	American Sign Language
AT	Assistive Technology
AUT	Autism Spectrum Disorders
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan
CIMP	Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process
DB	Deaf Blindness
DD	Developmental Delay
DHH	Deaf and Hard of Hearing
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEA	Exceptional Children’s Educational Act
ECSE	Early Childhood Special Education
ELA	English Language Acquisition
ELC	Early Learning Center
ELL	English Language Learner
ESY	Extended School Year
FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education
FBA	Functional Behavior Assessment
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
GT	Gifted and Talented
HI	Hearing Impairment
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
IFSP	Individual Family Service Plan
IHCP	Individual Health Care Plan
ID	Intellectual Disability
LEA	Local Education Agency
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment

MD	Multiple Disability
MI	Multi-Intensive
MIA	Multi-Intensive Autism
MIS	Multi-Intensive Severe
MTSS	Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
OCR	Office of Civil Rights
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
OHI	Other Health Impaired
O&M	Orientation and Mobility
OP	Orthopedic Impairment
OT	Occupational Therapy
Part B	Special Education – School-Aged Children
Part C	Special Education – Birth-3years old
PBIS	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support
PBS	Positive Behavior Supports
PWN	Prior Written Notice
OI	Orthopedic Impairment
PT	Physical Therapy
RtI	Response to Intervention
SED	Serious Emotional Disability
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
SL	Speech Language
SLI	Speech Language Impairment
SLP	Speech Language Pathologist
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
VI	Visual Impairment