

What is special education?

Special education is classroom instruction for children ages 3 and 22 who have a disability that causes them to need special help in school.

Disabilities that may allow a child to get special education services include problems with speech or language, autism, attention deficit disorder, problems with hearing or seeing, intellectual or learning disabilities, neurological or physical problems, serious emotional problems, traumatic brain injury, and other health problems such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome.

If your child is younger than age 3 and you are worried about their ability to see, talk, hear, move, eat, or play, the Birth to Three System can help. For more information:

- Talk to someone at your school district.
- Call the Child Development Infoline at 1-800-505-7000, or go to www.cdi.211ct.org.
- Find the Birth to Three System for your town at www.birth23.org/towns.

How can my child get special education services in school?

If you think your child has a disability, you can ask in writing for your child to be evaluated for special education eligibility. This is called a referral to special education. A referral to special education can be made by the child's parent or legal guardian, the child's teacher or other school staff, a professional such as a pediatrician or social worker, or the student (if age 18 or older).

The district **must** make a referral to special education if the child is suspended multiple times or their attendance, behavior, or progress in school is poor.

For detailed information, go to:

www.CTLaw.Help/special-ed

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Need help?

Statewide Legal Services

www.slscct.org

1-800-453-3320 or 860-344-0380

SLS provides free advice to low-income people who have legal problems in Connecticut. For some legal problems, they may send you to another legal aid program or to a volunteer attorney.

eviction Got a housing problem?
HELP 1-800-559-1565
CT www.EvictionHelpCT.org

How to contact your local legal aid office:

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

203-946-4811

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

860-541-5000

Connecticut Legal Services

Bridgeport

203-336-3851

New Britain

860-225-8678

New London

860-447-0323

Stamford

203-348-9216

Waterbury

203-756-8074

Willimantic

860-456-1761

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Special Education

Statewide Legal Services

1-800-453-3320

The Planning and Placement Team (PPT)

Once a referral to special education has been made, the school district should form a *Planning and Placement Team* (PPT) and schedule a PPT meeting. The PPT is a group of people who work together to plan for your child's educational needs. Parents are important and equal members of the team. At the first PPT meeting, the team will:

- Talk about the reason for the referral to special education.
- Look at how your child is doing in school.
- Consider information about your child coming from you, teachers and other school staff, and professionals such as a school psychologist or an occupational, speech, or physical therapist.
- Decide if your child needs to be evaluated for special education.

My child is eligible for special education. What happens next?

The Individualized Education Program (IEP)

The next step is to hold a meeting to create an *Individualized Education Program*, or IEP, which is a plan for your child's education. At the meeting, the team should talk about the special education services your child will get and set reasonable goals for your child's education.

The IEP must be put in writing and the school district must get your written permission to place your child in special education. The school district cannot force you to agree to special education for your child.

Where will my child get special education services?

Your child's special education program may be given in

- regular classes with support services,
- special classes or schools,
- your home,
- a hospital, or
- a residential program.

Your child must be placed in the *Least Restrictive Environment* (LRE) possible, meaning your child should stay in the regular classroom unless the team thinks your child cannot be successful there even with support services. Support services may include:

- an aide in the classroom;
- more time with the special education teacher or other service providers, such as a speech and language therapist;
- use of computers or other technology; or
- changes to the regular education curriculum.

Remember: The school district must pay for the special education program and the services recommended by the Planning and Placement Team in the IEP.

The annual PPT meeting

At the annual PPT meeting, you and the other team members will talk about your child's progress toward the goals and objectives in the current IEP and develop an IEP for the next school year. The team should consider

- your child's strengths and weaknesses,
- your child's areas of improvement,
- your concerns,
- the results of any evaluations,
- behaviors that may interfere with your child's learning, and
- whether your child needs technology to help them communicate.

Can my child's IEP be changed?

Yes. Make sure any changes are put in writing and ask for a copy of the revised IEP for your records.

A PPT meeting will usually be held before a child's IEP is changed, but there may be times when you and the school district agree to a change without having to hold a meeting. This type of change is called an *Amendment to the IEP*. There is a form you must fill out (Form ED634), and the agreement is only official after you have signed and returned it.

Will my child be evaluated again?

Yes. Your child must be reevaluated at least once every three years unless you and the school district agree otherwise. Evaluations must also be held before any significant changes are made to a child's special education placement, and before a child is removed from special education.

What can I do if I disagree with the school district about what is right for my child?

You have the right to disagree with the school district's decisions about your child. If you disagree, try to come to an agreement. If you still disagree, there are other ways to resolve a disagreement. It is best to talk to a lawyer if you can.

Complaint Resolution Process

If you think the school district broke a special education law, you can file a written complaint with the State Department of Education.

To get information about filing a complaint:

- Call 860-713-6943.
- Visit the State of CT page on Special Education Legal Resources at www.CTLaw.help/sp-ed-complaint.
- Visit www.CTLaw.help/special-ed.

Can my child be disciplined?

Yes, but there are limits on how the school district can discipline a child with a disability. Children with disabilities get extra protections if they are removed from school for more than 10 days or if the child's behavior was caused by the disability.

Questions or Problems?

Call Statewide Legal Services: 1-800-453-3320

School Expulsions: CTLaw.help/expel

Special Education: CTLaw.help/special-ed