

# Special Education

What Parents Need to Know and How to  
Advocate for Your Child





# Team Members

## Child Study Team Members:

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# What is Special Education?

- Special Education is a **program** which refers to a wide range of services that help students with a disability learn.
- Special Education is not a “one size fits all” approach. Rather, it’s tailored to meet the needs of each child
- Specially designed instruction
- Designed to meet the unique needs of an eligible child with a disability
- Provided in the most typical setting appropriate for the child

**Special Education is not a place.**



# Initial Evaluation Considerations

- Presenting academic, social and/or behavioral problems (parent and teacher report, supporting documentation)
- Results of pre-referral interventions include Basic Skills Instruction, I & RS, 504 Plan etc.
- Rule out hearing and vision concerns and identify medical conditions
- Suspected disability and impact to the academic functioning of the student



# Eligibility Considerations

## The three prongs:

1. A disability criteria is met (Refer to N.J.A.C. 6A:14); [N.J.A.C. 6A:14, Special Education](#)
2. There is academic impact
3. Special Education and Related Services are required

Although parental input is utilized in making eligibility determinations, the CST is responsible for determining eligibility for special education and related services and consent is not required.



# IEP Development

The IEP Team meets to discuss:

- The student's strengths and abilities
- Long term goals
- Parental concerns
- Evaluation results
- Teacher/related service provider information
- Other relevant factors
- Transition(High School)

**Parents/Guardians are a part of the IEP Team.** Also included are a special education teacher, general education teacher, case manager, additional CST members who can explain the evaluations, and related services providers if applicable.

At the age of 14, the student becomes a member as well. The parent can invite outside providers, consultants etc.



## **IEP Development (cont'd)**

The purpose of special education is to ensure that children with disabilities have a special education program designed to meet their basic unique needs and to prepare them for further education, employment and independent living (from IDEA 601 (d)(1)(A))

“Is this IEP an appropriate step toward a productive and independent life for my child?”



## Spectrum of Services and Variations

In New Jersey, special education law provides districts across the state with guidance and parameters for developing their special education programming. Each district works to develop its own system of resources in order to most effectively meet the needs of their population of children. As a result, there may be variations district to district, even when working within the parameters set forth by the state. Within a district, there may be variations year-to-year as the needs of the population shift, or there may be variations from primary to secondary within the district.

LEAST RESTRICTIVE

MOST RESTRICTIVE

In-Class  
Resource  
Supports

Pull Out  
Supports

Self-Contained  
Programs

Out of  
District  
Placements





# How to Prepare for a Meeting

1. Gain knowledge about the special education process
2. Understand your rights prior to your first meeting and thereafter; Parental Rights in Special Education click [here](#).
3. Access the New Providence School District website@ :<https://www.npsd.k12.nj.us/Page/394>. See below for examples of what can be found on the website.

“A Guide to the Special Education Process -- Prepared by a Subcommittee of Morris-Union Jointure Commission Directors of Special Services - To view, click on [this link](#).

Frequently Asked Questions click [here](#).

Glossary/Acronyms click [here](#).

**\*\*Any additional questions or concerns: Ask your case manager**



# How to Prepare for an Annual Review

- Take time to consider the previous year holistically
  - Consider strengths, challenges, preferences, learning styles, social emotional functioning, and peer relationships
- When possible and appropriate, provide your case manager with any significant updates prior to the meeting to maximize collaborative decision making
  - Any outside evaluations
  - Medical updates
  - Significant family/peer/environmental changes
- For parents of Middle/High School students
  - Take time prior to the meeting to discuss long term goals and interests
  - Consider the appropriateness of your child becoming a participant of their IEP meetings
    - Attending an IEP meeting can help students develop self-advocacy, develop a more in-depth understanding of their learning differences, and gain awareness about modifications and accommodations



# What is the Role of the Parent?

- Parents are a valued member of the IEP team who adds valuable information to the entire process
- The law supports and encourages parental involvement in the Special Education process
- Only you have an in-depth, long term, daily relationship with your child
- You are the only permanent member of the special education team and can share a historical perspective.
- Research and experience show that special education is more effective when parents are involved
- When parents are involved, children perform better and school experience is enhanced.
- FYI. . . . Once a student enters eighth grade, they become a more active member in their educational planning and are invited to their IEP Meetings.

# How Are Parents involved?

- Participate at special education team meetings
- Read their child's school records
- Consider proposed program and services
- Provide consent as appropriate
- Provide the context of the child's experience outside the school and functioning in the community to help the IEP team gain an understanding of the "whole" child.
- Communicate with teachers, administration, school counselors, CST

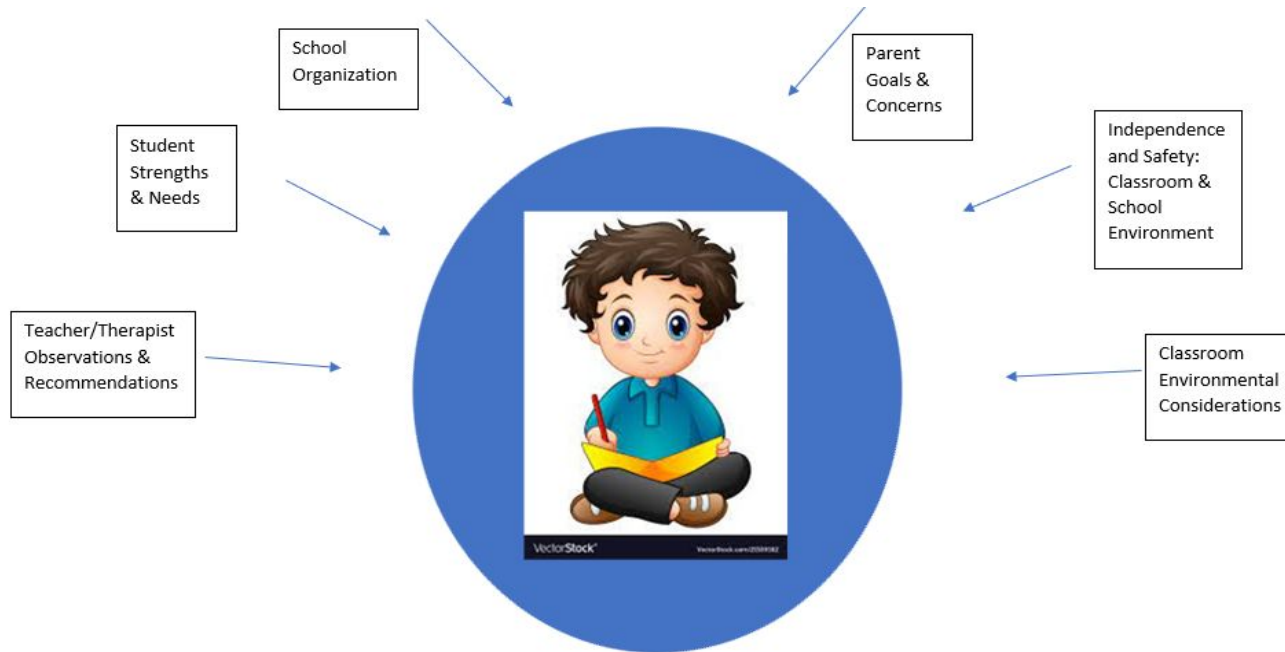


## What if You Disagree?

- **First, meet with the CST/school staff to collaborate and problem solve**
- Contact administration
- Consider your options(refer to Parental Rights in Special Education click [here](#))

# Balancing Act

Your child's team consists of multiple members, all of whom have expertise in various areas and who may have varying perspectives and recommendations for programming. Moreover, your child is a multifaceted individual, with strengths and weaknesses, which may impact them differently within different contexts. As your case manager, part of our process involves consideration and balancing of multiple perspectives, approaches, and other factors in order to develop the most appropriate program for each individual student, within the school district. Our goal is always to be an advocate for your child and work together with you..





## Placement Decisions

1. The IEP Team determines the appropriate placement, program, IEP goals and services based on your child's needs.
2. The IEP Team's determination takes into account which placement and program will be provided in the least restrictive environment.
3. Least restrictive environment (LRE) means a child who receives special education should be in the same classrooms with typical peers as much as possible.

Unless there is a strong reason, i.e need for modified curriculum, disruptive behavior, individualized instruction, intensive services, etc. the child should be placed in a general education setting. LRE is an important part of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act(IDEA), the U.S. special education law and N.J.A.C. 6A:14

LRE isn't a place — it's a principle that guides a child's education program.

## *Balancing Act: Free & Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*

Our ultimate, long-term goal for our students is to prepare them to be independent self-sufficient members of society, to the greatest extent possible, whether their path involves future educational pursuits, employment, and/or independent living beyond high school. In the short term, this involves consideration of appropriate levels of support that address deficits that are preventing a student from learning within the general education classroom. The question at play is *what is the right level of support/service needed to allow the child to remain in the academic classroom?*

Extra  
Occupational  
Therapy  
Sessions



Decrease  
in Class  
Time

An increase in services does not always translate to a greater benefit to the child and the ultimate goal of increasing their ability to learn within the general education classroom. The question for school-based services: *Is this service necessary for the student to remain able to attend/participate in class?*





# Advocating for Your Child Within the School System

1. Establish a trusting and communicative relationship with your case manager, school counselor, and teachers.
2. Work to establish ties within the larger educational community, particularly with the PTA.
3. Become involved in district-wide decision making, particularly through the Board of Education. Be a visible stakeholder within the larger community.





## Advocacy: An Ongoing Process

Parent communication: Work with your case manager to bring up concerns regarding your child's experiences, both within school and the impact of school-based assignments on outside experiences.

Larger contextual considerations: Work with your child's case manager to bring concerns to school staff and other community stakeholders to investigate possibilities. Open the door for further conversation and trouble-shooting. Larger change is built upon small steps.



Parent input: Work with your child's case manager to share your ideas, both large and small, on how to improve the child's experience.

Trouble-shooting: Work with your child's case manager to better understand the implications involving school schedules, PTA processes, etc. Once identified, these obstacles can be worked through more effectively.



# Middle/High School Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does Special Education preclude my child from taking honors level courses?

A: No. Honors criteria are listed in each course description in the [program of studies](#). Any student that meets the criteria can take the class. It is beneficial to bring up interests in honors level courses at an IEP meeting to consider the individual students' needs and if honors is the right fit.

Q: Can I share information with the case manager that I am not comfortable sharing with the IEP team?

A: Of course. If there are personal factors that are impacting a student's academic or social-emotional wellbeing, looping in the case manager is important. Conversations will include options to best support the child and helping determine if/what information would be beneficial to share with teachers. No information will be shared without consent.

Q: Do teachers draw attention to my child's IEP in co-taught classes?

A: Teachers work together to integrate special education strategies and techniques into daily lessons that target individualized education program (IEP) goals. This creates an environment where IEP need and goals can be met while maintaining confidentiality.

Q: Can my child take a foreign language as pass/fail?

A: Technically yes, however this should be discussed with the case manager through the lens of long term goals and post secondary planning.



# Parent Resources & Helpful Info. . . .

Mental Health and Other Support Services in Union County <https://www.unionresourcenet.org/>

National Alliance of Mental Illness(NAMI)-NJ <https://www.nami.org/Find-Your-Local-NAMI/Affiliate?state=NJ>

Behavioral Health, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse:  
N.J. Children's System of Care <https://www.performcarenj.org/>

Autism New Jersey <https://autismnj.org/>

Tourette Association of America <https://tourette.org/>

SPAN: Parent Advocacy Network <https://spanadvocacy.org/>

Special Education Parents Advisory Group <https://www.npsd.k12.nj.us/Page/12575>

Early Intervention(infant to 3 years old) <https://www.nj.gov/health/fhs/eis/for-families/when/>

Attention Deficit Disorder: CHADD.org <https://chadd.org/>