

Special Education Services for School Age Children

There are several public education programs that children and youth with special needs may qualify for. These are federally mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and include:

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Students with disabilities or delays may qualify for specialized school services under an IEP. The family, school staff, and other professionals work together to develop an IEP for each student that qualifies. Progress towards the IEP goals are tracked for each child and the IEP is revised at least once a year in light of this progress. The IEP specifies the appropriate level of support or setting for the child. IDEA mandates that the child be served in the “Least Restrictive Environment” that can meet his/her needs. Some options include:

- Accommodations or modifications to the general education classroom or curriculum to help the student be more successful in that environment.
- Specialized therapy services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling or social work services.
- “Resource room” or other “pull-out” options where the student is removed from the general education classroom for part of the school day to receive specialized instruction.
- A special education classroom where the student spends much of his/her time in a setting with other students with special needs and staff that are specially trained to teach students with special needs.
- A specialized school that serves only students with specific needs and has staff that are trained to meet those needs.
- Students who are home schooled or enrolled in a private school can also access specialized therapy and other services from the public school district if they qualify for an IEP.

IEP Services for Young Adults 18-21

Students with disabilities can continue to receive school services until age 21. In fact, it is generally a good idea to keep students enrolled until this time, because many adult services do not begin until educational services end at 21. In addition to the IEP placement options outlined above, some districts have Community Transitions or other vocational & community living preparation programs.

504 Plan for K-12 Students

Section 504 provides services and accommodations if a child has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. The definition of disability under Section 504 is much broader than under the IDEA, so many students who are not eligible for an IEP may be eligible for extra support under Section 504. 504 plans can make provisions for modifications or accommodations to the classroom or curriculum or extra support for the student.

How do I determine if my child is eligible for these services?

Contact your Local School District to Request an Evaluation

Even if your child is not yet in school, you should contact the special education office in your local school district using the information on the next page to make your request.

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School District Contact Information

Bellingham Schools: 360-676-6458 Special Education Office specialeducation@bellingshamschools.org 1306 Dupont St, Bellingham, 98225	Blaine School District: 360-332-0722 Federal & Special Programs Randy Elsbree, Director 770 Mitchell Avenue, Blaine, WA 98230
Ferndale School District: 360-383-9212 Student Services Department http://ferndalesd.org/special-services/ POB 698, 6041 Vista Dr, Ferndale 98248	Lynden School District: 360-354-2893 Special Programs Office Tim Metz, Director metzt@lynden.wednet.edu 205 S. BC Ave. Suite 115, Lynden, WA 98264
Meridian School District: 360-398-9898 Special Programs Carolyn Jenkins, Director x 2155 214 W. Laurel Road, Bellingham, WA 98226	Mt. Baker School District: 360-383-2012 Special Programs Ian Linterman, Director PO Box 95, Deming, WA 98244
Nooksack Valley School District: 360-988-4754 Special Services x 5296 Carol Lagasse, Administrative Assistant x 2155 3326 E. Badger Road, Everson, WA, 98247	Lummi Nation School: 360-758-4300 Special Education Department Willetta Gorge, Special Ed. Director x 4319 2334 Lummi View Dr., Bellingham, WA 98226

How Do I Make a Referral?

Do It in Writing

A referral must be in writing, unless the person making the referral is unable to write. It can be simple and handwritten or via email. Make sure to date it and keep a copy for your records. Please see the [Sample Evaluation Letter](#) on the Taking Action [Handouts Webpage](#) for an example.

Don't Worry About It Being Perfect

Do worry about getting it done as soon as possible. Nothing will happen until a referral is made, and the date that the district receives the referral triggers the timelines within which the district must act.

Be Specific About What Type of Issues You Think Your Child Has

Districts are required to test in all areas related to a student's suspected disability, so make sure you describe all of the areas of concern. For example, if you think your child has difficulty reading and has emotional issues that need to be addressed, ask that both areas be evaluated.

Use Examples

Include your own observations to describe why you think your child may have a disability. If you have them, provide documents such as letters from doctors or mental health providers that indicate that your child may have an impairment.

¹ Parts of this handout are excerpted from the Office of the Education Ombuds Guide: *Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities in Public Schools*. This guide has much more detail and can be found at http://oeo.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/manual_students_with_disabilities.pdf.

What Happens When I Request a School District Evaluation?

To conduct a special education evaluation, the district must decide whether to evaluate a student, and then get permission or consent from the student's parent or guardian to perform the evaluation. School districts must evaluate a student in every area related to his or her suspected disability. The evaluation must be done at no cost to the student or family. There are three basic steps to make an evaluation happen:

Step 1: Someone makes a request that the student be evaluated.

Under Washington law, the following people or entities can refer a student for evaluation:

- Anyone who meets the definition of parent
- Others persons knowledgeable about the child
- School district
- Another public agency

Step 2: The district decides if an evaluation is necessary.

The district has 25 school days to decide whether to evaluate a student. In making its decision to evaluate, the district must review any existing educational and medical records in the school files or provided by a parent or caretaker.

Once the district has made a decision about whether to evaluate, the district must send the parent or guardian a written notification of the decision. If the district decides not to evaluate, you can challenge the decision.

Step 3: The parent gives the district consent to evaluate.

The parent needs to give consent before the evaluation can begin. Once consent has been given, the school has 35 days to evaluate the student and determine whether they have a disability and need special education services. * "Parents" can include legal guardians or others such as grandparents, stepparents with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare.

The School District Evaluation

The district may evaluate a child in the following areas:

- Health (physical & mental health)
- Communication, speech & language
- Social & emotional health
- General intelligence
- Academic performance
- Motor abilities
- Vision
- Hearing

The district must evaluate a child in ALL areas in which a disability is suspected. The special education evaluation has two purposes: 1) to determine eligibility for services, and 2) to identify the needs and strengths of the student so that an individualized education program can be developed. You want to make sure that your child is evaluated in all areas where you think s/he might have challenges in order to get the most appropriate services and education plan for your child. Typically the consent form you sign indicates the areas which they are planning to evaluate. Look over this list and ask the district to include any important areas that are missing.