

What Is Special Education?

Special education is specially designed instruction that addresses the unique needs of a student eligible to receive special education services. Special education is provided at no cost to parents and includes the related services a student needs to access her/his educational program.

How Special Education Works

A Guide to the Special Education Process

Special education is not a place, but a service! Special education is governed by numerous processes and procedures designed to provide your student with an appropriate educational program. You do not need to become an expert in all areas of special education to be a good educational advocate for your student. Having a firm understanding of the basic special education processes and procedures, however, will help you navigate each step along the way.

The following is an overview of 10 important steps in the special education processes that mark the progression of every student's special education program. This list is not comprehensive. Rather, it serves as a guide to helping you understand where you might be in the process and what procedures may be applicable.

Step 1: Student Assistance Team (SAT): General Screening and Student Intervention Guidelines

Each school has a Student Assistance Team (SAT) whose purpose is to support the progress of students struggling with the general education curriculum despite the use of differentiated instruction and universal interventions. The SAT develops Tier 2 interventions for at-risk students who are not responding to the Tier 1 core program in the general education environment for students who might need supplemental, strategic, and individualized support. For example, a Tier 2 intervention may include lessons and other skill building activities specifically prescribed to your child through the I station program that Bernalillo Public Schools (BPS) utilizes for kindergarten through 8th grade.

Referring your child to SAT does NOT automatically result in special education referral or services especially if your child is making appropriate progress in all area(s) of concern. Initial evaluation for special education (Tier 3 interventions) is appropriate only when the SAT team recommends the same or agrees with a parent request.

Step 2: Referral

A referral is made for your student to be evaluated for special education (only when all steps in the SAT process have been completed and Tier 2 interventions have not been successful).

A referral for an initial special education evaluation is made within the SAT. The district will then review completeness of the referral packet.

Step 3: Consent to Evaluate

BPS will decide to evaluate your student for special education and obtains your consent.

The district must obtain your informed consent before conducting the initial evaluation. A diagnostician, a person who specializes in administering psycho-educational evaluations to determine the existence of a disabling condition, will contact you to obtain such consent.

Step 4: Initial Evaluation

Your student is evaluated for special education.

After obtaining your informed written consent, the district may proceed with its initial evaluation. The evaluation process must be completed within 60 school days after the district receives your consent. The evaluation must be comprehensive and must address all areas of a suspected disability, including those areas which may or may not be directly related to the suspected eligibility category included in the referral.

Step 5: Initial Evaluation Report

Your student's eligibility for special education is discussed.

You and a group of qualified professionals (principal/assistant principal, diagnostician, general education teacher, special education teacher, etc.) meet to review your student's initial evaluation report. The initial evaluation report consists of results from all of the assessments conducted, the information gathered from reviewing existing records and data, and any additional information you may have provided. The team will discuss the results of the initial evaluation report and make a determination about your student's eligibility for special education services. He/she may or may not be eligible for such services depending on information gathered by the team.

Step 6: Eligibility and Consent

What happens if your student is found to be eligible? Special education services will then...

If it is determined that your student has a disability and needs special education services, then your student will be eligible for special education. Your student's special education and any related services will not start, however, until you give consent for special education to begin. Once you give consent, the district will formulate a team to begin working on creating an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for your student.

Step 7: Creating an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An IEP Team meeting is held and an IEP is written.

Once your student is found eligible for special education services, an initial IEP meeting will be held immediately after (same day right after the eligibility determination meeting). You, as a parent or guardian, are included as an important member of the IEP team. The IEP team uses the information previously gathered from the initial evaluation to talk about your student's needs, write the IEP, and decide upon the appropriate placement for implementing the IEP.

Step 8: Special Education Begins

The school district implements your student's IEP.

The services identified in your student's initial IEP should be made available as soon as possible after the IEP team develops an IEP. You will receive a copy of the IEP. If your child is a member of any of the Pueblo, the school will provide you two (2) copies of the IEP, one for you to keep and one for you to provide to the Pueblo's Education Department if you so choose.

Each of your student's teachers and service providers will also have access to the IEP and know their specific responsibilities for carrying out the IEP. This information is typically called the "*IEP Program-at-a-Glance*." These responsibilities include any of the accommodations, modifications, and supports identified in your student's program.

Step 9: Progress Monitoring & Annual IEP Review

Your student's progress is measured throughout the year, an annual IEP meeting is held, and the IEP is updated.

The IEP team is required to meet, at least once a year, to review your student's progress and update the goals and services that make up her/his specialized program. As a member of the IEP team, you are invited to participate in the annual IEP team meeting and can make suggestions for changes to the IEP for the upcoming year.

Step 10: Reevaluation

Your student is reevaluated at least every 3-years to determine if she/he continues to be eligible for special education services.

Your student is reevaluated, at least every three years, to determine if she/he continues to need special education services. A reevaluation may occur sooner, however, if your student's needs change to the extent that the most current evaluations do not provide enough information for the IEP team to revise the IEP.

Step 11: Transition

A transition plan is developed and included in your student's IEP.

By the time your student turns 16 years old, the IEP must have an appropriate transition plan in place for when your student will either graduate from high school or exceed the age requirements for special education. You and your student are invited to participate in the IEP team meetings to create this transition plan, and together, can make suggestions for appropriate postsecondary goals and transition services.

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