

# A GUIDE TO PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION



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Check the NYSED website (<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov>) for new information on preschool eligibility and Special Education programs/services.



# DEAR PARENTS:

This handbook is a quick reference guide designed to help you understand preschool special education. If you have concerns about your preschool-aged child's development including social emotional skills, learning speech or motor skills or the ability to use appropriate behavior to meet their needs, this resource will provide you with information about possible educationally related services for your child.

This booklet includes:

- Preschool Special Education at a Glance
- The Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE)
- How Special Education Services are Provided
- Preschool Evaluations
- Eligibility for Preschool Special Education
- You are a Team Member
- The CPSE Meeting
- The Service Continuum
- Your Role

**The Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC)** can talk with you if you have individual questions or concerns that relate to your child, family or school district.

You can contact the ECDC by phone at  
315-443-4444 or 1-800-962-5488  
by e-mail at [ecdc@syr.edu](mailto:ecdc@syr.edu)  
or visit our website at <http://ecdc.syr.edu>.



# PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION AT A GLANCE



## 1. Referral

As a parent, you can make a written referral directly to the school district's Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) in the district in which you reside. If you have not already done so, you should register your child in your school district when you make the referral. If you need guidance about how to make a referral, the ECDC can assist you. Call 315-443-4444.

Upon receiving the referral, the school district will send to the family an information package with a list of evaluation sites, parent rights, and a **CONSENT FORM**. **The consent form must be signed and returned to the school district stating the preferred evaluation site.** The ECDC can provide updates on timeframes for various evaluation sites.

When the CPSE receives the consent form, the process begins. The state requirement is that the evaluation and CPSE meeting occur within 60 calendar days of the date the district receives the signed consent.

## 2. Evaluation

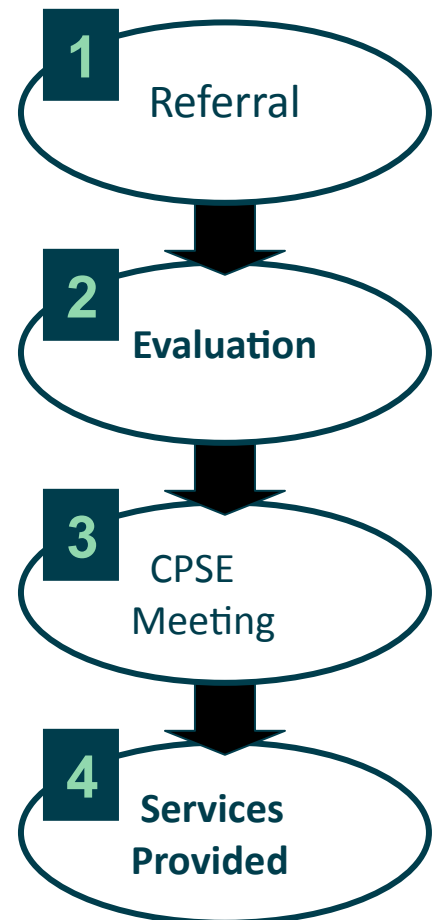
The CPSE Chairperson notifies the chosen evaluation site and a free, multidisciplinary evaluation for the child will be scheduled.

## 3. CPSE Meeting

After the evaluation, the CPSE will meet with you to determine whether your child is eligible and discuss appropriate services for your child. You can bring anyone you choose with you to the meeting. At this meeting an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be developed by you and the team. Goals and services for your child will be spelled out. The plan will also say how and when the service providers will communicate with you.

## 4. Services Provided

Within 60 school days after the school district receives your signed consent your child should begin to be receiving the services agreed to. The county arranges transportation your child if it is identified as part of their IEP.



# THE COMMITTEE ON PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION (CPSE)



The Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) reviews many kinds of information to determine which children are eligible to be served, what services are needed, and where and how often services are delivered. The CPSE consists of the Chairperson, someone who evaluated your child or can interpret the evaluation results, teachers, service providers, a county representative and YOU.

Other information about the CPSE:

- Each school district in NYS must have a Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE)
- The NYS Education Department (NYSED) is the oversight agency
- The CPSE develops an Individualized Education Program (IEP) if your child is determined eligible (see “Eligibility for CPSE” on page 8)

# HOW SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES ARE PROVIDED



Preschool children who have a delay in development may be eligible for special services. Every school district administers these services through its special education department.

eligible

## ***Areas of Development Evaluated for Determining Eligibility for Preschool Special Education Part 200.1 (mm) or (zz)***

Significant delay or disorder in one or more functional areas related to:

- language (talking and understanding)
- motor (walking and movement)
- hearing loss
- visual problems
- other developmental delays or problems **which adversely affects the student’s ability to learn**

## HOW SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES ARE PROVIDED CONT.



Each school district in New York State must have a Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) with a chairperson. If you suspect your child may have a problem, you can refer your child to the CPSE.

Preschool special education includes evaluation and a variety of special services. There are many choices as to where and how special services can be provided. You have a say in what happens. The special services your child receives are developed by the CPSE. The Committee consists of you, the chairperson from the school district, anyone you want to bring along, a representative from the county where you live, someone who evaluated your child or can interpret the evaluation, teachers, and a parent member from your district.

If you disagree with any part of this process there is assistance available to help you make sure your rights are not being violated.

Details about the steps of this process are provided in the rest of this booklet.



# PRESCHOOL EVALUATIONS



An **evaluation** is a careful examination of a child's skills, strengths and weaknesses to determine current levels of functioning and how best to plan for your child. What can he do? What does he like to do? What kinds of things should he be encouraged to do next? The evaluation process consists of gathering the following kinds of information, which may include:

- Physical examination
- Individual psychological evaluation
- Social history
- Observation of your child in a natural environment (home, child care site)
- Assessment of need for transportation
- Other appropriate assessments, such as a *Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)*—this is a **mandated evaluation component for a child whose behavior impedes or affects his/her learning or that of others**. For more information, go to <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/functionbehav.htm>

## Family Interview

During the evaluation process you will be asked to share information about your child. How does your child act at home? How has your child developed over time? What are your child's strengths and needs? What are your child's interests? What is your child's temperament? Questions such as these will be an important part of your child's evaluation.

## AN EVALUATION COMPONENT



During your child's initial assessment to determine eligibility, the approved preschool evaluators must assess your child in three areas of development:

- ◆ Positive social-emotional skills, including social relationships
- ◆ Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills including early language/communication and early literacy
- ◆ Appropriate behaviors to meet their needs

In each of these areas your child's typical functions across typical settings will be identified on a scale of 1 to 7:

- ◆ At the beginning of the scale is a 1 which would indicate that a preschool child does **not yet** show behaviors and skills expected of a child his or her age in any situation.
- ◆ In the mid-range a child's skills and behaviors are more like a younger child's and are **emerging**.
- ◆ At the end of the scale is 7 which would indicate that a child's behavior and skills are considered typical for his or her age.

The CPSE must review the assessment results in three outcome areas as part of their process to determine your child's eligibility. The accumulation of this information will help to determine if children learn new skills and more functional behavior as a result of their preschool special education.





## WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES?

### Eligibility for CPSE is:

- Based on an individual evaluation in student's native language
- Determined by multidisciplinary team
- Dependent on multiple sources of information

### Extent of Delay:

- A 12 month delay in one or more functional areas; or
- A 33% delay in one functional area; or
- A 25% delay in each of two functional areas; or
- At least 2.0 standard deviations below the mean in one functional area, or at least 1.5 standard deviations below the mean in each of two functional areas

A preschool student with a disability is a preschool child who, because of mental, physical, or emotional reasons, has been identified as having a disability and can receive appropriate educational opportunities from special programs and services approved by the Department of Education. Eligibility is determined by the Committee on Preschool Special Education.

A child can also be eligible by meeting the criteria for a development diagnosis of:

- autism
- deafness
- deaf-blindness
- hearing impairment
- orthopedic impairment
- other health impairment
- traumatic brain injury
- visually impaired, including blindness

Information on the official New York State definition and the criteria described here can be obtained from the ECDC.

## PRESCHOOL EVALUATIONS CONT.



### Testing

The formal testing includes all areas of development:

- **motor**—moving, including gross motor for skills like walking and climbing and fine motor for tasks like coloring and cutting
- **cognitive**—thinking, figuring things out, problem solving
- **speech/language**—talking, understanding, communicating
- **adaptive**—self-help in areas like dressing and eating
- **social/emotional**—getting along with others, coping
- **physical**—general health overview

For some children, the evaluation team might administer other assessments which, when reviewed in combination and compared to accepted milestones for child development, will determine the nature of your child's delay.

### You can participate in the evaluation process by...

- Talking about your concerns about your child's development
- Filling in paperwork and answering questions
- Describing how your child is at home
- Identifying how your child's development has changed over time
- Sharing what your child does well

## YOU ARE A TEAM MEMBER



The laws about Preschool Special Education identify parents as members of the CPSE. The Committee on Preschool Special Education is responsible for creating the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which is designed to identify the programs and services to meet your child's educational needs. Your child's IEP is developed by a **team** that includes you, other individuals who may be present are: another parent of a child with a disability from the school district a representative from the district, teachers (general and special education), other persons having knowledge of the child, (related service providers) an individual who can interpret the evaluation results, a representative from the county (as the county pays a portion of the cost for Preschool Special Education Services), and someone from EI when parent gives written permission.

That is quite a crowd! To help you feel part of the team your district should:

- give you at least 5 days notice about where and when the meeting will be held
- Let you know what will be discussed at the meeting
- let you know who will be attending the meeting
- reschedule the meeting if it is inconvenient for you to attend (let them know as soon as possible)
- provide copies of report summaries if you request them
- come to the meeting prepared with knowledge and information about your child that will guide the team in developing the IEP, not present you with an IEP that has already been completed before the meeting

## PREPARING FOR THE MEETING



Before your child's CPSE meeting, think about your answers to the questions below. All of these issues can and should be considered at the CPSE meeting. Your views and priorities for your child are important and should help guide the meeting!

- Are there aspects of your child's behavior that you believe interfere with learning? If so what?
- What are your child's strengths and weaknesses?
- What methods have you found to be effective in supporting your child's growth and development?
- How well does your child interact with other children their age?
- Do you want support for increasing your child's social skills?
- What are your feelings about providing opportunities for your child to interact with "typical" children?

You should leave the meeting with a clear understanding of:

- The services your child qualifies for
- Where and how often the services will occur
- Your child's strengths and weaknesses
- The goals that will be worked on for the school year
- The methods and services that will be used to reach these goals
- How the teacher/therapists will keep you informed about your child's progress
- Whether or not your child qualifies for transportation, if so, it will be identified on the IEP

You will be given a “Procedural Safeguards” booklet from your CPSE chair. If you have any questions about this booklet, call the ECDC at 443-4444.

***If you disagree*** with any recommendations that have been made, identify the recommendation and to talk about it. If you and the other members of the committee don’t reach agreement after talking the issue through, ask to meet again. It is helpful to put your concerns in writing.

***When you leave the CPSE meeting  
make sure you understand  
the recommendations that have been made.  
If you disagree with any portion of the IEP, make  
sure the minutes of the meeting document your  
disagreement.***



# YOUR ROLE



After the IEP is developed, there are some things you can do to make sure it is working well:

- Get to know your child's service provider—you can share information about things that are working and identify challenges that your child may have. An informational handout that you can use as you share this information is “All About Me.” To download a free copy, go to the ECDC website: <http://ecdc.syr.edu/AllAboutMeDownload.htm>.
- Have regular conferences or other agreed upon ways to communicate—the methods of informing you about your child's progress is now required to be part of the IEP. You might use notebooks, phone calls or meetings.
- Observe and listen to your child
  - ⇒ How is your child reacting at home?
  - ⇒ Are there behaviors that interfere with development or daily activities?
  - ⇒ Are there new skills you have seen?
- Share information with all team members that you think will impact your child.
- A final important thing to remember about any plan is that it must be reviewed regularly to make sure that it matches your child's strengths and needs.

You are a decision-maker. It may take some practice, but you can do it!! You have a right, protected by law, to be heard, participate, disagree and ask for changes. Remember, laws don't enforce themselves. Even if you feel nervous...speak up, ask questions, share your opinions about your child.

This is being a contributing member of a team that is working for your child! you disagree with any part of this process there is guidance available to help you make sure your rights are being upheld.

Procedural Safeguards Notice

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/prosafenotice/septcover.htm>



# THE SERVICE OPTIONS FOR PRESCHOOLERS

**Preschool children can receive services at community sites such as:**

- Home
- Nursery School
- Child Care Center
- Pre-Kindergarten
- Head Start
- Special Education Preschool

## **1. *Related Services.***

This option provides your child with the services of one or more therapists such as OT, PT, Speech, SEIT (Special Education Itinerant Teacher) to meet his/her special needs. The therapist works with the child a specified number of times determined by CPSE each week, and also resources with the family and the providers of any community based typical programs the child might attend. **The location of the services will be decided at the CPSE meeting.**

## **2. *Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT).***

This option provides a child with the services of a special education teacher. Sometimes other children with special needs receive services at the same time. The SEIT works directly with your child and with the child's family and/or regular teacher to help adapt any typical program to the child's needs. The SEIT will work with your child and family or program at least two hours each week. Some children in this model also receive related services. They will work with your child the amount of time prescribed on his/her IEP.

At your CPSE meeting, Options 1 & 2 **must** be considered for your child before more restrictive program options.

New York State's system allows for the provision of related services and SEIT within general education preschool and/or day-care environments as well as in the child's home.

### **3. *Special Class in an Integrated Setting (SCIS).***

In this model, a child with special needs is **placed in a class that contains both typical children and other children with special needs.** There is a special education teacher and assistants who work with the children. Related services are delivered in SCIS programs as identified in your child's IEP. Children attend these programs along with typical peers.

### **4. *Special Class.***

This is a class of no more than 12 children, all of whom have special needs. It is staffed by a special education teacher, and one or more assistants. Related services staff meet with each child as described in your child's IEP.

**The location of the services will be decided at the CPSE meeting.**

### ***In All Cases...***

The CPSE arranges for the appropriate amount of services to meet your child's special educational needs while ensuring that they are being served in the most natural setting. In other words, as much as possible, kids should be "just kids."











**Created and distributed by**  
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When you have questions about young children, call us.

**We know where to look for answers.**