



FAMILY GUIDE

Supporting Your Student at School



Brought to you by DCE Special Education Department

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Introduction

Welcome to the D.C. Everest Special Education Parent/Guardian Guide: Getting Help for Your Child at School. As parents, guardians, and caregivers, you play a vital role in your child’s education, and the District welcomes collaborating with you to ensure the best outcomes for your student. We recognize the educational landscape relies on numerous acronyms and jargon, so we have included a glossary at the end of this guide for your reference.

DCE has a multi-level system of supports (known as the Everest System of Support - ESS) for students, ensuring they receive necessary assistance and support as part of their daily educational experience (known as the “universal” level). To determine whether students need additional support beyond the universal level, the district relies on academic and behavioral data. Parents, guardians, and caregivers are always informed if the data indicates their child would benefit from receiving support beyond the universal level.



What should I do when I have a concern about my child?

When you have a concern about your child as it relates to school, the first step is to contact your child's teacher. They can provide insights into your child's daily experiences and may be able to offer immediate support or guidance. If your concern persists or requires further attention, you can reach out to the building principal, who can help you connect with the appropriate school staff member. Each school has a student services team that includes a school social worker, a school counselor, and a school psychologist who can follow up with you, gather more information, and suggest next steps. Academic supports are provided in a variety of ways, including groups within the regular classroom and intervention outside the classroom.

For behavioral support, the student services team collaborates with classroom teachers to implement strategies that best meet the needs of the student. They also offer small group instruction based on individual student needs.





Should I refer my child for a special education evaluation?

If you believe your child may have a disability, the best person to contact is the school psychologist at your child’s school. School psychologists coordinate all special education evaluations for their school, and they can help you decide whether to make a formal referral for a special education evaluation.

If you would like the District to evaluate your child for a potential disability, two types of evaluations can be conducted. The first is a special education evaluation, which determines if your child has a disability and needs specialized instruction to succeed in school. The second is a Section 504 evaluation, which assesses whether your child has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities and whether they need a Section 504 Accommodation Plan. Examples of Section 504 disabilities include but are not limited to, dyslexia, cerebral palsy, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, hearing impairments, asthma, neurological impairments, emotional illness, visual impairments, and learning disabilities.

What is the difference between an IEP and a Section 504 Plan?

In the section “Should I Refer My Child for a Special Education Evaluation?” we discussed two types of evaluations to determine if your child has a disability. The first type is related to a referral for a special education evaluation, and the second type is a Section 504 evaluation. There are key similarities and differences between an IEP and a Section 504 Accommodation Plan.

Special Education Evaluation	Section 504 Evaluation
The goal is to determine if the student has a disability.	The goal is to determine if the student has a disability.
An evaluation must be conducted to determine if the student has a disability.	An evaluation must be conducted to determine if the student has a disability
The team reviews state criteria to determine if the student has a disability and qualifies for special education services.	The team must determine if the student’s disability substantially limits a major life activity, which can include learning, reading, concentrating, or thinking, just to name a few.
If the student is found eligible and needs special education services, then the team develops an Individualized Education Program for the student.	If the student is found eligible under Section 504, the team develops a Section 504 plan for the student.
An IEP identifies the student’s special education needs, goals, accommodations, and specially designed instruction that the student requires to be successful in their educational setting.	Section 504 plans focus on providing accommodations and removing barriers in the general education environment. Section 504 Plans do not include specialized instruction or specific measurable goals for your child to meet.





What if my child’s doctor has concerns about developmental delays?

If your child’s doctor has concerns about their development, please contact your child’s teacher and the school psychologist. Medical professionals sometimes recommend special education services without fully understanding the qualification process. It’s important to know that even if a doctor suggests your child has a disability and needs school-based services, the District must first conduct an evaluation and determine eligibility based on state criteria.

Who should I contact if my child attends a private school in the D.C. Everest area?

If your child attends a private school within the DCE District boundaries and you believe they have a disability, the District is responsible for evaluating your child. Please contact your local Parochial Principal or Andy Low, DC Everest Area School District Assistant Director of Special Education at alow@dce.k12.wi.us if you have concerns. However, the District is not required to provide special education services in a private school setting. To receive most special education services, your child must attend a public school. The exception to this rule is if your child has a speech and language disability; in that case, the District may provide speech and language services in the private school setting.

What should I do if I have a concern about my child who is three or four years old and not in school?

If you have concerns about your 3- or 4-year-old child who is not yet in school, you should contact the 4K/EC Principal, Rachel Koss, at rkoss@dce.k12.wi.us. She can connect you with the appropriate staff members. If your child is younger than 3 and receives county Birth-to-Three services, the Birth-to-Three providers will refer your child for a special education evaluation to the District before your child turns three if they believe continued services are necessary. The District provides special education services starting at age 3, provided the child meets the state criteria for a special education category.

What is the process for making a referral for a special education evaluation for my child?

- Contact your student's school administrator, teacher or psychologist to express concerns and inquire about the referral process.
- Parental Rights: Understand that parents/guardians have the right to refer their child for a special education evaluation at any time.
- Special Education Referral Form: Be prepared to share detailed information about your concerns, including:
 - Why do you believe your child has a disability?
 - Specific areas of concern (e.g., academics, communication, social-emotional learning, physical health, vision, hearing, fine motor or gross motor skills).
 - Any outside services your child has received (e.g., medical providers, counselors).
- IEP Team Formation: Once the referral is submitted, the school psychologist will assemble an Individual Education Program (IEP) team that includes:
 - Parents/guardians
 - Child (when appropriate)
 - LEA (Local Education Agency) representative (e.g., school psychologist or administrator)
 - Regular education teacher
 - Special education teacher
 - Related service providers, if appropriate (e.g., speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists)
- Review of Existing Data: The IEP team will meet to discuss what assessments are needed for your child's evaluation. Many times this meeting is as simple as a phone call with the school psychologist.
- Assessment Process: After the review meeting, you will be asked to sign a consent form allowing the District to administer the necessary assessments. These assessments may require multiple testing sessions, during which your child might be removed from class. Other forms of testing can include rating scales completed by caregivers and teachers.
- Consent Form: Once you sign the consent form, the District has 60 calendar days to complete the assessments and hold an evaluation meeting.
- Eligibility Determination Meeting: Within 60 calendar days of receiving the signed consent for testing, the IEP team will hold an eligibility determination meeting to review the evaluation results and determine if your child has a disability and needs special education services.

What criteria are used to determine if my child has a disability?

In Wisconsin, the State has established specific criteria for each disability area. The IEP team carefully reviews the data gathered during the evaluation process to determine if your child meets the eligibility criteria for any of these disability areas. If your child is found eligible, the team then works together to develop an Individualized Education Program. This document outlines the services and supports the school will provide to meet your child's unique disability-related educational needs.



What disability areas are considered in the special education evaluation process?

Educational Autism: Autism is a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, often characterized by repetitive behaviors, resistance to change, and unusual sensory responses. It adversely affects educational performance.

Blind and Visually Impaired: Visual impairment, including blindness, refers to a vision impairment that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. This includes both partial sight and blindness.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Deafness is a hearing impairment so severe that it affects processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, adversely affecting educational performance. Hard of hearing refers to a hearing impairment, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects educational performance but is not classified as deafness.

Deafblind: Deafblindness involves both hearing and visual impairments, leading to severe communication and developmental needs that cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or blindness.

Emotional Behavioral Disability: This includes a broad range of behavioral and mental health conditions that significantly impact a student's ability to function in the school setting.

Intellectual Disability: This involves significantly low general intellectual functioning, along with deficits in adaptive behavior, that adversely affects educational performance.

Orthopedic Impairment: This includes severe orthopedic impairments that adversely affect educational performance, including impairments caused by congenital anomalies, disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, fractures, or burns causing contractures).

Other Health Impairment: This involves limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, due to chronic or acute health problems, that adversely affect educational performance.

Significant Developmental Delay: This disability involves significant delays in two or more of the following areas: gross or fine motor skills, cognitive ability, communication, emotional deficits, and adaptive skill deficits.

Specific Learning Disability: This refers to a disorder or significant delay in learning academic skills in reading, math, written language, or listening comprehension.

Speech and Language: This includes communication disorders such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or voice impairment, that adversely affect educational performance.

Traumatic Brain Injury: This refers to an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, adversely affecting educational performance.



What are the components of an Individualized Education Program?

Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: This section outlines your child's current performance levels, including strengths and needs. It includes academic data and information related to your child's functional performance, such as social-emotional functioning and their ability to succeed in the school setting.

Disability-Related Needs: Based on the present levels, this part of the IEP identifies specific areas where your child requires support or improvement. It highlights the educational needs that the IEP will address.

Measurable Annual Goals: These are specific, measurable objectives designed to help your child make progress in areas of academic achievement and functional performance. The goals are tailored to your child's unique needs and abilities.

Special Education Services: This section details the special education services and supports your child will receive to help them achieve their goals. It may include specialized instruction, related services, accommodations, and modifications.

Test Accommodations: This section specifies any accommodations your child will receive for assessments, ensuring they can demonstrate their knowledge and skills on tests.

Transition Plan: For students aged 14 and older, this section outlines the transition services and activities that will help your child prepare for life after high school. It includes goals related to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living.

Behavior Intervention Plan: If your child requires behavior support, this section outlines strategies and interventions to address challenging behaviors and promote positive behavior in school.



How often does the IEP team review the plan?

The IEP team meets annually. During this meeting, you will discuss in detail with your student's teachers and specialists how your child is progressing at school, in the community, and at home. This is an opportunity to talk about your child's strengths, challenges, changes in behavior, home life, medications, or any outside diagnoses. Together, you and the IEP team will develop a plan that best supports your child. The team's goal is to collaborate with you to provide the best possible services and support to meet your child's needs. Additionally, it's important to know that the IEP team can reconvene at any time during the school year at your request or at the request of any team member.



Preparing for your child's IEP meeting

An Individualized Education Program meeting is a crucial opportunity to collaborate with your child's school team to ensure your student receives the necessary support. Here are some steps to help you prepare:

- **Reflect on Your Child's Strengths, Interests, and Challenges:** Consider what your child excels at, what they enjoy, and where they may need additional support.
- **Current Goals and Skills:** Reflect on your child's current goals and skills.
- **Review the Current IEP and Progress Reports:** Familiarize yourself with your child's current IEP, including their needs, goals, and services.
- **List of Discussion Items:** Make a list of topics you want to discuss at the meeting, including any questions, concerns, or suggestions you may have.
- **Consider IEP Team Members:** Decide who you want to invite to the meeting. You can include other adults who understand your child's needs or who can provide support.
- **Notify the School:** If you plan to invite someone from outside the school, such as a friend, relative, or outside provider, inform the school in advance.
- **Discuss the Meeting with Your Child:** If your child will attend the meeting, talk to them about what to expect and what will be discussed. Encourage your child to share their thoughts and feelings.

How often will the IEP team reevaluate my child?

Your child will have a reevaluation meeting every three years while they are in the special education program, or more frequently if additional needs arise or if we are considering discontinuing services. During this time, your child's special education teacher and/or the school psychologist will discuss conducting specific tests in your child's identified areas of need to assess their progress over time. This helps special education teachers and specialists gain a clear, updated understanding of your child's current skills and set new goals based on the data. As part of the reevaluation process, the team will also review the collected data to determine if your child continues to meet the criteria for their disability and if they still require special education services.

What happens if I disagree with an IEP team decision?

If you disagree with your child’s IEP team, remember that you are an integral member, and your opinion is valuable. If there is a decision you do not agree with during the IEP meeting, you can request to schedule another meeting to address the concern. You also have the right to ask to include the Assistant Director of Special Education or the Director of Special Education in the meeting for additional insights and support. Additionally, you may consider adding an advocate to your team; advocates can offer guidance and support throughout the process. If a resolution cannot be reached, the Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System is available to help resolve disagreements. While parents play a crucial role in the decision-making process, the Local Education Agency representative on the IEP team makes the final decisions if the team cannot come to a consensus.

When should my child exit special education?

IEP team will reevaluate your child Every three years to determine if they are still eligible for services. If your child no longer meets the state criteria for special education, they may exit the program. However, if you feel that your child’s needs have changed significantly, you can request a reevaluation at any time. Generally, the district does not conduct reevaluations if the student has been reevaluated within the last 12 months. It’s also important to know that as a parent, you have the right to remove your child from special education services at any time, even if they still qualify for services. Your child’s well-being and educational success are the top priorities, and decisions regarding their special education services should be made with their best interests in mind.



Glossary

Adaptive Skills: Also known as life skills, adaptive skills are necessary for independent and effective daily living. These include communication, self-care, social skills, and the ability to work and follow rules.

BIP/BSP: Behavior Intervention Plan/Behavior Support Plan. These plans outline strategies and supports to address challenging behaviors and promote positive behavior in students.

Disability: A disability is a physical, sensory, cognitive, or developmental condition that significantly impacts a person’s ability to perform daily activities, including learning.

DPI: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, which oversees public education in the state.

ESY: Extended School Year, a special education service providing instruction and related services beyond the regular school year for students with disabilities to prevent regression of skills.

Executive Functioning: Cognitive skills that help individuals plan, organize, manage time, pay attention, and regulate emotions to achieve goals.

FAPE: Free Appropriate Public Education, a requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandating that eligible students with disabilities receive education tailored to their individual needs at no cost to the family.

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law ensuring students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs.

IEP: Individualized Education Program, a written plan developed for each student eligible for special education that outlines their educational goals, services, and accommodations.

LEA: Local Education Agency, the public school district responsible for providing education to students within a specific district.

LRE: Least Restrictive Environment, a requirement under IDEA that states students with disabilities should be educated to the maximum extent appropriate for students who are not disabled.

ESS: Everest System of Support, also known as MTSS, is a framework used by schools to provide early intervention and support to students at risk for academic or behavioral difficulties.

Transition: Process of preparing students with disabilities for life after high school, including further education, employment, and independent living.



Vision Statement

The D.C. Everest Area School District Special Education Department, in partnership with administration, staff and the community, is committed to providing an innovative and

equitable learning environment with the goal of developing knowledgeable, productive, caring, creative, responsible individuals with disabilities prepared to meet the challenges of an ever-changing global society.

Mission Statement

Provide an educational experience for students with disabilities that values:

- high expectations for ALL
- standards based learning and grading
- a diverse and expansive continuum of services
- free and appropriate public education (FAPE)
- individual needs of each student
- specially designed instruction (SDI)
- appropriate accommodations and modifications
- least restrictive learning environment (LRE)
- responsive interventions
- meaningful inclusive classroom experiences (i.e. co-teaching)
- culturally responsive practices
- growth in student self-determination, self-advocacy & independence
- opportunities for vocational training and paid employment experiences
- high quality professional development
- community partnerships
- positive relationships between students, families, staff and administration
- trauma sensitive practices
- universal design for learning
- progress monitoring
- State and Federal laws

Learn More:

<https://www.dce.k12.wi.us/departments/special-education>

