Overview of Special Education Programs



Office of Student Services & Special Education
100 Walnut Street Newton, MA 02460
Phone: (617) 559-6000

Published April 2026

NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Where every student can thrive

Dear Parents, Caregivers, and Families,

We are pleased to share this guide to special education services in Newton Public Schools. This resource is intended to provide a clear and lasting overview of how we support students with disabilities across our district, and to serve as a reference for families over the coming years.

At Newton Public Schools, we are committed to ensuring that every student is known, valued, and supported to reach their full potential. Our work is grounded in the Portrait of a Learner, which reflects our shared vision for all students to develop adaptability, critical thinking, effective communication, empathy, and a strong learner's mindset. These competencies, alongside rigorous academics, prepare students to thrive in a complex and changing world.

Our approach to special education is guided by a few core principles:

- **All students are known and valued.** Each child's strengths, identity, and voice are central to their educational experience. A strong sense of belonging is foundational to learning.
- **Access to grade-level curriculum.** With the right supports and accommodations, all students can engage with and succeed in rigorous academic content.
- **Individualized supports.** We recognize that each student's needs are unique, and we provide tailored academic, social-emotional, and mental health supports.

The Office of Student Services provides a comprehensive continuum of services for students ages 3–22. Our focus is on ensuring equitable access, promoting excellence, and fostering meaningful inclusion across all aspects of school life. We are committed to partnering with families, educators, and school leaders to support students in achieving both academic and personal success.

As a district, we also continue to deepen our focus on belonging. Schools are places where students build relationships, develop confidence, and learn what it means to be part of a community. This sense of connection is essential to student well-being and growth. Our ongoing work includes strengthening inclusive practices, addressing ableism, and ensuring that all students—especially those with disabilities—feel respected, safe, and connected.

This guide reflects our core values as a district: diversity, student well-being, empathy, excellence, love of learning, equity, inclusion, and opportunity. These values shape not only the services we provide, but also the experiences we strive to create for every student and family.

Families are essential partners in this work. Your voice, insights, and collaboration are critical to ensuring that students receive the support they need to succeed. We encourage you to stay engaged with your child's team and to connect with SEPAC, a strong community of caregivers who offer resources, advocacy, and shared learning.

We hope this guide serves as a helpful and enduring resource as you navigate special education services in Newton Public Schools. Together, we are building an inclusive learning community where every student can thrive, embrace challenges, and shape their future with confidence, curiosity, and joy.

With appreciation and partnership,

Anna Nolin, Superintendent Newton Public Schools
Casey Ngo-Miller, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Dianne Lochhead, Interim Director of Elementary Special Education
Melissa Gamble, Assistant Principal of Special Education
Shannon Filipiak, Director of Out of District Special Education

NEWTON
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Where every student can thrive

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ITEM	PAGE
Introduction	3
Continuum of Special Education Services	4
Related Services	5
Program Availability, Grade-Level Needs, and Cohort Development	6
Pre-School Programs	7
Elementary School Programs	8-9
Middle School Programs	10-11
High School Programs	12-13
Post Graduate Programs	14
RESOURCES: IEP Team Specialist by School	15
RESOURCES: Frequently Asked Questions	16
RESOURCES: Enrollment	17
RESOURCES: Newton SEPAC	18
RESOURCES: Understanding the IEP Timeline & Key Steps	19
RESOURCES: What Exactly Happens at an IEP Meeting?	20

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES:

Published: April 2026

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Overview

Newton Public Schools (NPS) is deeply committed to supporting students with disabilities by educating them in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Over the years, this commitment has grown into a core part of who we are as a school community. We believe students thrive most when schools, families, and caregivers work together as partners.

This guide aims to provide an overview of the specialized programs available across the school district. It serves as a resource for IEP teams—including parents, caregivers, educators, and related service providers—to understand program options when considering appropriate educational placements for students with disabilities. All placement decisions are made by the IEP team based on the individual needs of the student, as determined through the IEP process and in accordance with state and federal special education laws.

Legal Framework for Special Education Services

Special education services in Newton Public Schools are guided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), federal regulations, and Massachusetts special education laws and regulations. These laws require school districts to provide students with disabilities a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated alongside peers without disabilities, with the supports and services necessary to help them make effective progress.

Federal regulations also require that school districts ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities (34 C.F.R. §300.115). This continuum includes a range of instructional settings and service models so that the level of support provided can be matched to a student's individual needs. In addition, districts must ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same educational opportunities available to all students (34 C.F.R. §300.110).

Within this framework, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team determines the services, supports, and placement that will best meet a student's needs. The goal is to provide the level of support necessary for the student to make effective progress while maintaining access to inclusive educational environments whenever appropriate.

Published: April 2026

CONTINUUM OF SERVICES

Newton Public Schools provides a continuum of services designed to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities while supporting access to the general education curriculum whenever appropriate. The services described below represent instructional models that may be used within the district. The specific combination of services and settings recommended for an individual student is determined through the IEP Team process and is based on the student's unique needs.



FULL INCLUSION
Students receive instruction in general education classrooms with support.

CO-TEACHING
Two or more adults share responsibility for delivering instruction and support

PARTIAL INCLUSION
Students participate in general education for part of the day and specialized instruction for another.

SUB-SEPARATE PROGRAMS
Students receive intensive specialized instruction in a smaller setting and are educated outside of the general education classroom for most of the school day.

Full Inclusion

In a full inclusion model, students receive instruction within the general education classroom alongside peers without disabilities for most or the entirety of the school day. Specialized instruction, accommodations, and related services are provided within the classroom whenever appropriate. Special educators and related service providers collaborate with general education teachers to support access to grade-level curriculum and address individual learning needs.

Co-Teaching

Newton Public Schools strives to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms as much as possible in order to support effective progress. One way this is achieved is through co-teaching.

In co-taught classrooms, two or more adults share responsibility for instruction and student support. Depending on the classroom and grade level, this may include combinations of general education teachers, special education teachers, teaching assistants, and behavior therapists. Co-teaching arrangements may vary across preschool, elementary, and secondary settings and may also differ depending on the subject area being taught.

In practice, co-teaching may take several forms. Newton Public Schools uses these models flexibly across schools:

- One Teach, One Observe – One teacher provides instruction while the other observes students to gather information about learning, engagement, or behavior.
- Station Teaching – Students rotate among instructional stations, with teachers providing small-group instruction at different stations.
- Parallel Teaching – The class is divided into two groups, with each teacher delivering instruction to a smaller group simultaneously.
- Alternative Teaching – One teacher works with the majority of the class while the other provides targeted instruction to a smaller group of students.
- Teaming – Both teachers share responsibility for instruction and jointly lead the lesson.
- One Teach, One Assist – One teacher leads instruction while the second teacher circulates to provide individual support to students as needed.

These approaches allow educators to vary group size, instructional methods, and levels of support while maintaining access to the general education setting.

Partial Inclusion

Students in a partial inclusion model participate in general education classes for part of the school day and receive specialized instruction in a smaller setting for another portion of the day. This approach allows students to engage with grade-level curriculum and peers while also receiving targeted instruction aligned with their IEP goals.

Sub-Separate Programs

Substantially-separate programs provide more intensive specialized instruction in a smaller classroom setting for students whose needs cannot be met within the general education environment, even with supports and services. These programs offer individualized instruction and additional supports designed to help students make effective progress. When appropriate, students may participate in general education classes or school activities to maintain connections with the broader school community.

Specialized Instruction

(Push-In and Pull-Out Services)

In addition to classroom placement, students may receive specialized instruction to address specific learning needs identified in their IEP.

Push-In Services occur within the general education classroom. A special educator or related service provider works with the student in the classroom environment while instruction is taking place.

Pull-Out Services occur in a smaller setting outside of the general education classroom for a portion of the school day. This instruction typically focuses on specific skills aligned with the student's IEP goals.

The IEP Team determines the balance of push-in and pull-out services based on what will best support the student in making effective progress.

Published: April 2026

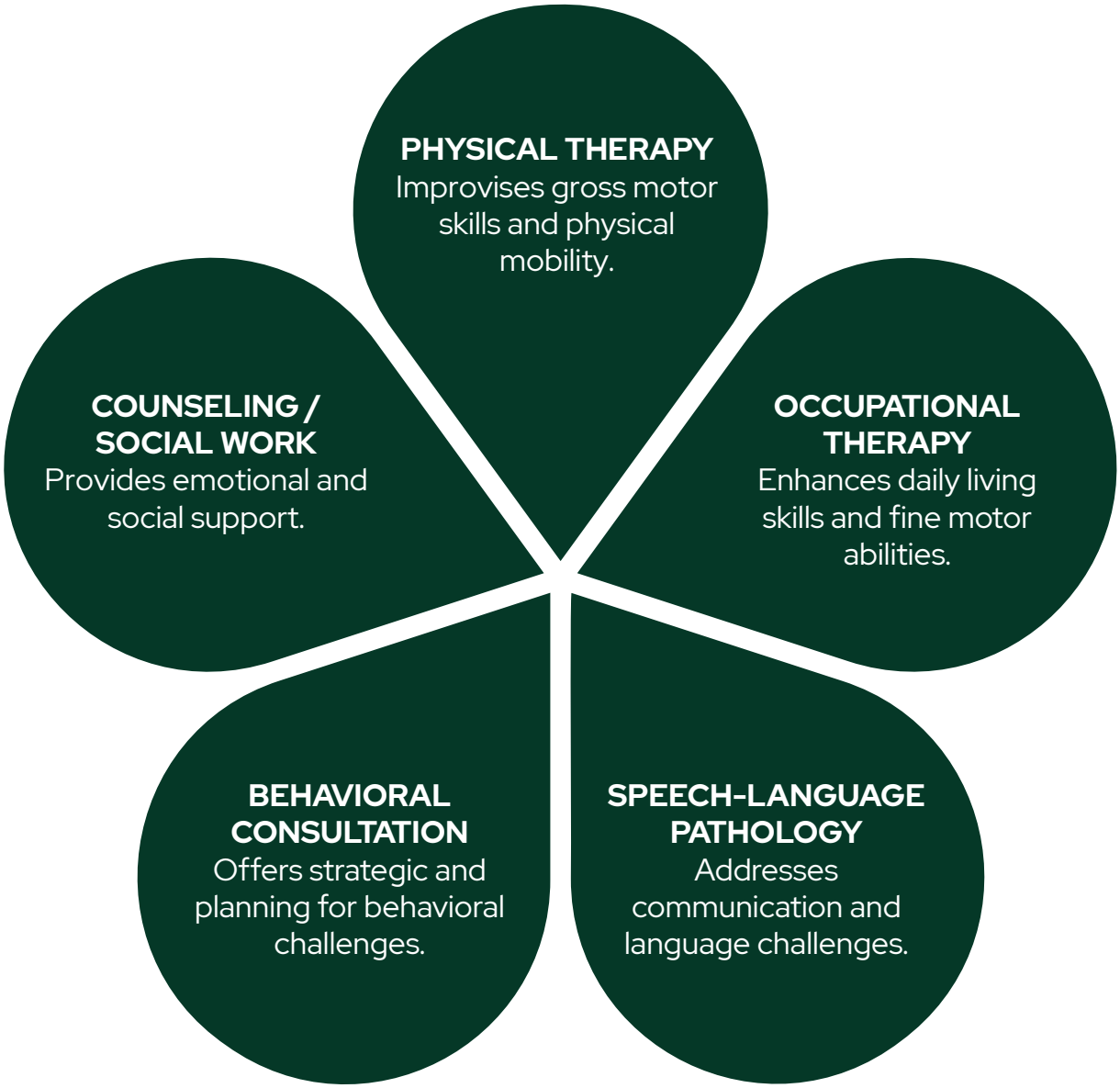
RELATED SERVICES

Some students require additional services in order to access the curriculum and benefit from their education. These are referred to as related services and are provided when necessary to support a student's educational program.

Related services may be delivered individually, in small groups, or within the classroom depending on student needs.

Examples may include:

- Adapted Physical Education (APE): services for students who need specialized instruction to access the general education physical education curriculum
- Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): Individualized behavior intervention and skill development.
- Assistive Technology (AT): Tools, devices, software and services that support students to increase, maintain or improve their functional capabilities.
- Counseling Services: Emotional, behavioral, and social support for students.
- Occupational Therapy (OT): Support access to the curriculum focusing on fine motor, visual motor/ perception, sensory, and daily living skills.
- Physical Therapy (PT): Support ability to access the school environment, specifically looking at mobility, strength, and motor coordination.
- Speech-Language Pathology (SLP): Services for communication, language, and social pragmatics.
- Vision and Hearing Services: Specialized instruction and support for students with sensory needs.



Published: April 2026

PROGRAM AVAILABILITY, GRADE LEVEL NEEDS AND COHORT DEVELOPMENT

Newton Public Schools strives to maintain a comprehensive continuum of services across the district so that students can receive appropriate supports while remaining connected to their school communities whenever possible.

Our Approach: Each year, the district reviews student needs across schools and grade levels to determine whether there are sufficient numbers of students with similar profiles to support the development or continuation of specialized programs. This review process considers factors such as student learning profiles, programmatic needs, grade-level enrollment, staffing, and the availability of appropriate peer cohorts.

Specialized services and program models may therefore exist within certain grades or schools when there is a demonstrated need within that building or when there are enough students with similar learning profiles to form an appropriate program cohort. In some cases, services may be developed to support the needs of students within a particular grade level at a school. In other cases, programs may be located at a specific school and serve students from across the district.

Peer cohorts are an important component of specialized programming because they allow students to learn alongside others with similar instructional needs and goals. Cohorts also support opportunities for social interaction, peer modeling, and effective instructional grouping.

Because student needs and enrollment patterns change over time, specialized programs may be located at certain schools rather than at every school in the district. The presence of a program at a particular school does not necessarily mean that the same program will be available at every school or at every grade level.

Placement decisions for individual students are made through the IEP Team process and are based on the student's needs, the services required to support effective progress, and the availability of appropriate program options and peer cohorts within the district.

Program Acronym Definitions

- **FOCUS** - Flexible, Organized, Centered, Understanding, Social Intelligence
- **REACH** - Reading, Executive Functioning, Academics, Communication, Helping students succeed
- **RISE** - Reaching Individual Success Empowers
- **SPARK** - Social, Pragmatics, Academics, Respect, Knowledge
- **STRIDE** - Structured Teaching through Research and Intensive Experiences

NPS Special Education Programs Currently Offered

Grade/Age (School)	**STRIDE** *Autism focused, highly structured*	**Reflections, Connections** *Complex Medical & Multiple Disabilities*	**Bridge, Pilot / Southside, Central & Compass** *Therapeutic - Emotional*		**SPARK, RISE, FOCUS & STEP** *Social-Communication & Executive Function*		**Language - Based, REACH and Achieve** *Academic Language Focus*	**Direct Instruction** *Highly Structured Academic Program*
Preschool Age 2.9-5	STRIDE (NECP)	Early Childhood Services (NECP)						
Elementary Grade: K-5	STRIDE (Bowen, Cabot & Zervas)	Reflections (Williams)	Bridge (Peirce)		Spark (Countryside)		REACH (Lincoln Eliot) Achieve (Angier)	
Middle School Grades 6-8	STRIDE (Brown)	Reflections (Day)	Bridge (Day)		SPARK (Brown)	FOCUS (Brown)	Language Based Learning (Oak Hill)	Direct Instruction (Oak Hill)
High School Grades 9-12	STRIDE (North & South)	Connections (North)	Pilot (North) Southside (South) Central High (Ed. Center)	Compass (North & South)	RISE (South)	STEP (North & South)	Language Based Learning (North & South)	
Post Graduate	STRIDE (North)	Community Connections (Ed Center)						

Published: April 2026

PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS (AGES 3-5)

Evaluations & Eligibility for Special Education Services

Special Education regulations govern the process of determining eligibility for special education services. For evaluations for students 3-5 years of age, evaluations are done only with parent referral and parent signature on an "evaluation consent" form generated by NECP. Once the evaluation consent form has been received by NECP, Massachusetts Special Education Regulations allow for thirty (30) school days to complete the assessment(s). When all applicable formal evaluations have been completed, participants meet as a Team to determine eligibility for special education services. The Team includes (as appropriate) the parents, community preschool teachers, early intervention therapists, and the Newton Public Schools evaluators. This meeting must occur within forty-five (45) school days of receipt of the evaluation consent form.

If a child is found eligible for special education services, a plan that describes the child's learning profile, instructional needs, appropriate goals, and educational placement is developed by the Team. This plan is called an Individualized Educational Program (IEP). The specific services, settings for service delivery, and providers are detailed in the plan

.

Newton Early Childhood Program (NECP), Ages 3-5

Student Profile: Children (ages 3, 4 and 5), including those turning 5 during the school year (5 after August 31), who have special education needs and require educational and/or related services.

Key Supports: Structured teaching, visual supports, communication training, related services as applicable.

STRIDE Preschool at NECP, Ages 3-5

Student Profile: Students in the STRIDE program typically have significant challenges with: verbal and non-verbal communication (may use augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) devices) behavior, including inflexibility and restricted/repetitive behaviors social skills, including very limited social interactions academics; most students are performing below grade level and have difficulty accessing traditional instruction. The majority of students have a diagnosis of autism. All students require intensive, highly specialized and individualized instruction and support to access learning.

Key Supports: ABA, structured teaching, visual supports, communication training, and related services as applicable.







Newton Early Childhood Program is located at 687 Watertown Street (entrance on Albemarle Road), Newton, MA 02460

This district-wide integrated preschool caters to children aged 2.9 to 5 years old, serving up to 200 full-time and 100 part-time students, including those with special needs who receive comprehensive speech, occupational, and physical therapies.

Published: April 2026

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS (K-5)

Achieve at Angier Elementary, Grades: 2-5

Student Profile: Students who access this program have been identified as having an educational disability which is a primary specific learning disability in basic reading and/ or written expression and may have a diagnosis of dyslexia or other language based learning disabilities that significantly impact their ability to read fluently, decode and encode words and may impact their overall reading comprehension skills. Students could also require instruction around reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

Key Supports: Instruction emphasizing a multi-sensory, systematic approach to teaching reading, support with other curriculum areas, and organization as needed. Curriculum accommodated to student needs; supported by related services in IEPs.



Angier Elementary

REACH at Lincoln-Eliot Elementary, Grades: 4-5

Student Profile: Students identified with language based learning disabilities, and/or communication disabilities. Students typically have support needs in reasoning, decoding, fluency and comprehension, as well as overall written expression.

Key Supports: Highly structured, language-based approach in partial inclusion model. Sub-separate instruction in ELA and math with modified curriculum. Speech and language services embedded into instruction.



Lincoln-Elliot Elementary

Bridge at Peirce Elementary, Grades: K-5

Student Profile: The Bridge Program serves students with a primary disability that results in challenges related to Health Impairment, or Emotional Impairment, and focusing on developing behavioral skills.

Key Supports: Therapeutic supports, behavior intervention, and academic instruction with modifications. Focus on emotional regulation and coping skills.



Pierce Elementary

SPARK at Countryside Elementary, Grades: K-5

Student Profile: The SPARK Programming supports students with the primary educational disability of Autism or a Communication disability with deficits in social pragmatics, communication and social interactions. Students present with a variety of challenges including anxiety, social thinking, self-awareness and executive functioning, as well as sensory and emotional regulation. In addition, students' learning may not be at grade level, and their needs are best met in a smaller separate classroom, or in a partial inclusion environment.

Key Supports: Small group instruction in academics, self regulation, pragmatic language, and problem-solving. Collaboration with special educators, SLP, OT, BCBA and psychologists.



Countryside Elementary
Shown: New building drawing, anticipated move in date in CY 2027)

Published: April 2026

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS (K-5)

Reflections at Williams Elementary, Grades: K-5

Substantially Separate Program: (Lower Classroom K-2) and Upper Classroom (3-5). All students are assigned to a general education classroom with inclusion opportunities that vary depending on individual needs.

Student Profile: Reflections is a specialized program designed to address the cognitive, social, communication/language, and physical needs of students. Educational disability categories may include, but are not limited to, intellectual, autism, communication, physical, sensory, and/or health. The learning profiles of the students necessitate extensive content modifications and instructional methodology that integrates functional skills and substantial related services to access general education content.

Key Supports: The team consists of Special Education Teachers, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Adapted Physical Education, Assistive Technology, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, Teacher of Students with Hearing Impairments, Orientation and Mobility, BCBA, Psychologist, Speech and Language Providers, and close collaboration with nursing.



Williams Elementary

STRIDE at Bowen, Cabot and Zervas Elementary, Grades K-5

Student Profile: Students in the STRIDE program typically experience significant challenges in several areas, including verbal and non-verbal communication (and may use augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) devices), behavior (such as inflexibility and restricted or repetitive patterns), and social skills, often demonstrating limited social interaction. Academically, most students perform below grade level and may have difficulty accessing traditional instruction. The majority of students have a diagnosis of autism. All students require intensive, highly specialized, and individualized instruction and support to access learning.

Key Supports: The STRIDE program is a substantially separate program, with general education inclusion opportunities, as well as, community based vocational and life skills instruction on an individual basis. Students primarily receive their instruction in 1:1 and small group settings using ABA methodology embedded throughout their school day.



Bowen Elementary



Zervas Elementary



Cabot Elementary

Published: April 2026

MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS (GRADES 6-8)

FOCUS at Brown Middle School

Student Profile: Students in the FOCUS program have a primary educational disability category of Autism or other similar educational disabilities. Students present challenges in the areas of social thinking, self-awareness, executive functioning, perspective-taking, and emotional and sensory regulation. Students are able to access their academics within the general education classrooms, but have difficulty negotiating a large school environment independently, as well as understanding and navigating social rules.

Key Supports: FOCUS offers support with self-awareness, regulation, social competency and stress and anxiety management.

SPARK at Brown Middle School

Student Profile: Students in the SPARK program present with a primary educational disability of Autism or a Communication disability with deficits in social pragmatics, communication and social interactions. Students present with a variety of challenges including anxiety, social thinking, self-awareness, and executive functioning, as well as sensory and emotional regulation. In addition, students' learning may not be at grade level, and their needs are best met in a smaller, substantially separate classroom, or co-taught environment.

Key Supports: Targeted social skills groups, small academic classes, pragmatic language instruction, and executive function coaching.

STRIDE at Brown Middle School

Student Profile: Students receiving support through the STRIDE program at the middle school level require intensive behavioral, academic and communication support and receive almost all of their instruction via the methodology of discrete trial instruction.

Key Supports: The STRIDE program is a substantially separate program, with general education inclusion opportunities, as well as, community based vocational and life skills instruction on an individual basis. Students primarily receive their instruction in 1:1 and small group settings using ABA methodology embedded throughout their school day.







Brown Middle School

Published: April 2026

MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS (GRADES 6-8)

BRIDGE at Day Middle School



F. A. Day Middle School

Student Profile: The Bridge Program serves students with a primary disability that results in challenges related to social, emotional, and behavioral skills; students likely have primary educational disability classification of Emotional Impairment or Health Impairment. Students also are in need of a therapeutic environment and milieu to access their curriculum.

Key Supports: Therapeutic and academic supports, behavior plans, counseling, and skill development.

Reflections at Day Middle School

Student Profile: Students in the Reflections program have a complex cognitive and social profile that necessitates extensive content modifications and instructional methodology that integrates functional skills as part of access to curriculum. Educational disability categories may include, but are not limited to, intellectual, autism, communication, physical, sensory, and/or health. Students in the Reflections program may have historically been in an inclusion placement with the need for significant pull-out instruction away from their general education peers for skill building, and can now receive whole group differentiated instruction as part of the classroom community.

Key Supports: The team consists of Special Education Teachers, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Adapted Physical Education, Assistive Technology, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, Teacher of Students with Hearing Impairments, Orientation and Mobility, BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst), Psychologist, Speech and Language Providers and close collaboration with nursing.

Direct Instruction at Oak Hill Middle School


Oak Hill Middle School

Student Profile: Students who participate in Direct Instruction may have been identified as having a wide range of educational disabilities. Their educational disability impacts them in a way that they have reduced or slowed progress with the academic curriculum delivered in general education classrooms. These students are often working several years behind grade-level, and need explicit and intensive instruction in order to close the gap. Many of these students also have challenges with social skills. While these students are socially motivated and share their peers' interests, they may need assistance to develop the social pragmatic skills. Many of these students also have challenges with organization, planning, and work production. They need to be taught strategies to further develop their executive functioning.

Key Supports: Special education teacher(s) oversee the delivery of specialized academic instruction using Direct Instruction curricula. The program receives comprehensive consultation from a BCBA, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, and other related service providers. Students may also have additional individualized services in speech and language, social communication, occupational therapy, adapted physical education, music therapy, and counseling.

Language Based Learning Program at Oak Hill Middle School

Student Profile: Students who access this program have been identified as having a primary specific learning disability in basic reading and/ or written expression and may have a diagnosis of dyslexia or other language based learning disabilities. Some of these students will have deficits in spoken language and comprehension of spoken language. Many of these students will have also been diagnosed as having language based learning disabilities. Language-based learning disability (LBLD) refers to a spectrum of difficulties related to the understanding and use of spoken and written language. Students who require instruction in this program have language based learning disabilities that significantly impact their ability to read fluently, decode and encode words and may impact their overall reading comprehension skills. They also require instruction around reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

Key Supports: Structured, multisensory instruction, such as phonics and structured reading programs, alongside explicit instruction in executive function skills like organization and time management.

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS (GRADES 9-12)

Compass at Newton North & Newton South High School

Student Profile: The Compass program services students who have a primary emotional disability and are able to access the general education environment with therapeutic support embedded throughout their educational experience. Compass students are typically academically very capable, but have difficulty socially and emotionally in the larger school environment. Students have access to the full range of courses and services that are available within the school.

Key Supports: Therapeutic supports, counseling, and behavior intervention with academic instruction. Ongoing communication with parents, guardians, and school personnel is an integral part of the program.

Connections at Newton North

Student Profile: Students in the Connections program have a complex cognitive and social profile that necessitates extensive content modifications and instructional methodology that integrates functional skills as part of access to curriculum.

Key Supports: The team consists of Special Education Teachers, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Adapted Physical Education, Assistive Technology, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, Teacher of Students with Hearing Impairments, Orientation and Mobility, BCBA, Psychologist, Speech and Language Providers and close collaboration with nursing.

Language Based Learning Program at Newton North & Newton South High School

Student Profile: Students have been identified as having a primary specific learning disability in basic reading and/ or written expression. Many of these students will have also been diagnosed as having language based learning disabilities. Language-based learning disability (LBLD) refers to a spectrum of difficulties related to the understanding and use of spoken and written language. Students who require instruction in this program have language based learning disabilities that significantly impact their ability to read fluently, decode and encode words and may impact their overall reading comprehension skills. They also require instruction around reading, writing, listening and speaking skills that have language based instructional methodologies. Some students may also require additional support around receptive and expressive language needs.

Key Supports: Structured, multisensory instruction, such as phonics and structured reading programs, alongside explicit instruction in executive function skills like organization and time management.

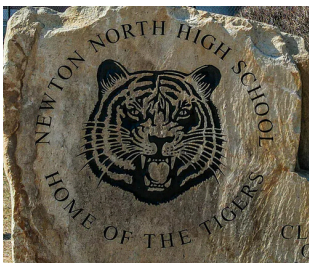
Step at Newton North & Newton South High School

Student Profile: Students in the Step program may present with Autism or similar disabilities with a variety of challenges, including anxiety, social skills, self-awareness, and executive functioning as well as sensory and emotional regulation. The Step program provides support for students who are typically academically very capable, but have difficulty negotiating a large school and understanding social rules. Additionally, students in the program may have high levels of anxiety in the classroom and during unstructured times of their day. Students have access to the full range of courses and services that are available within the school.

Key Supports: STEP offers support with self-awareness, regulation, executive functioning skills, social competency and stress and anxiety management.











Newton North High School

Published: April 2026

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS (GRADES 9-12)









Newton South High School

STRIDE at Newton North High School & Newton South High School

Student Profile: The STRIDE program is a district-wide program to support students with autism and related disorders in which learners have significant impairments in the areas of communication, behavior, social skills, academics, and adaptive functioning. Students receiving support through the STRIDE program at the high school level require intensive behavioral, academic and communication support and receive almost all of their instruction via the methodology of discrete trial instruction.

Key Supports: The program uses the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to increase functional living skills, adaptive behaviors, independence, communication, and vocational skills. The STRIDE program is a substantially separate program, with general education inclusion opportunities, as well as, community based vocational and life skills instruction on an individual basis. Students primarily receive their instruction in 1:1 and small group settings using ABA methodology embedded throughout their school day.

Pilot at Newton North High School / Southside at Newton South High School

Student Profile: The Pilot and Southside programs service students with primary emotional disabilities who require therapeutic supports in order to make effective progress. Students may also have other disabilities that impact them. Pilot and Southside students have difficulty making effective progress in the larger school environment and benefit from wraparound therapeutic support. The programs aim to provide as many inclusion opportunities for its students as is appropriate based on their individualized needs.

Key Supports: Therapeutic and academic supports, counseling, and behavior plans.

Rise at Newton South High School

Student Profile: Students in the Rise program may present with Autism or similar disabilities with a variety of challenges, including anxiety, social skills, self-awareness, and executive functioning as well as sensory and emotional regulation. Academically, students are able to access the general education curriculum content but may require a varied pace of instruction and also need a focus on social skill and social pragmatic development.

Key Supports: Direct instruction in communication, executive functioning, and self-advocacy skills. Student performance is monitored closely by maintaining effective communication with Special Education teachers, specialists, and families.

Central High School Program at Newton Education Center

Student Profile: The Central High School Program serves students with a primary disability that results in challenges related to social, emotional, and behavioral skills; students likely have primary educational disability classification of Emotional. Students may have other co-occurring disabilities but the Emotional disability is their primary disability and they require a substantially separate therapeutic environment to access their education.

Key Supports: Intensive therapeutic intervention within a highly structured, small group setting. Counseling services and support provided in 1:1 sessions and in small group settings. The adjustment counselors work closely with outside counselors as needed. These sessions focus on topics such as emotional regulation, decision-making-skills, age-appropriate social skills, and independent living skills.

POST GRADUATE PROGRAMS PROGRAMS (AGES 18-22)

Community Connections at Newton North High School and Newton Education Center

Student Profile: Students who are supported in Community Connections often have intensive disabilities that present with complex cognitive profiles and at times, complex social profiles. These may include, but are not limited to, autism spectrum disorder, communication, intellectual, physical, sensory, and/or health disabilities. Students in Community Connections require intensive, substantially separate program interventions that include extensive modifications and instructional methodology to develop transition related skills.

Key Supports: Focus on vocational training, independent living skills, community participation, and continued academic or functional skill development.

STRIDE at Newton North High School

Student Profile: The STRIDE program is a district-wide program to support students with autism and related disorders in which learners have significant impairments in the areas of communication, behavior, social skills, academics, and adaptive functioning. Students in the STRIDE program post graduation are those who have not met high school graduation requirements and need highly structured and individualized programming and support in order to transition into adulthood.

Key Supports: The STRIDE program is a substantially separate program, with general education inclusion opportunities, as well as, community based vocational and life skills instruction on an individual basis. Students primarily receive their instruction in 1:1 and small group settings using ABA methodology embedded throughout their school day.



Newton Education Center

Published: April 2026

RESOURCES
CONTACTS BY SCHOOL

OFFICE OF STUDENT SERVICES

- Casey Ngo-Miller - Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
  EA: Erika Green, Phone: (617) 559-6025
- Dianne Lochhead - Interim Director of Elementary Special Education
  EA: Ann Picariello, Phone: (617) 559-6035
- Melissa Gamble - Director of Secondary Special Education
  EA: Anita Chen, Phone: (617) 559-6035
- Shannon Filipiak - Director of Out of District Special Education
  EA: Skyla Eastman-Difusco, Phone: (617) 559-9042

PRESCHOOL

Newton Early Childhold Program (NECP)
Phone: (617) 559-6050
Director: Kathleen Browning
Asst. Director: Trish Szoke

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Angier Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9300
Asst. Director: Tracey Hatch
IEP Team Specialist: Rachel Griffin

Bowen Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9330
Asst. Director: Lindsey Mueller
IEP Team Specialist: Rachel Abraham

Burr Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9360
Asst. Director: MaryBeth Kinkead
IEP Team Specialist: Sarah Lipsitt

Cabot Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9400
Asst. Director: Lindsey Mueller
IEP Team Specialist: David Wright

Countryside Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9450
Asst. Director: Tracey Hatch
IEP Team Specialist: Rachele Thivierge

Franklin Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9500
Asst. Director: Ally Andrews
IEP Team Specialist Shannon Forbes

Horace Mann Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9510
Asst. Director: Ally Andrews
IEP Team Specialist: Kathleen Slozak

Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9540
Asst. Director: Ally Andrews
IEP Team Specialist: Kristen Lord

Mason-Rice Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9570
Asst. Director: MaryBeth Kinkead
IEP Team Specialist: Kat Rooney

Memorial-Spaulding Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9330
Asst. Director: MaryBeth Kinkead
IEP Team Specialist: Rachel Abraham

Peirce Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9630
Asst. Director: MaryBeth Kinkead
IEP Team Specialist: Kathleen Slozak

Underwood Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-9330
Asst. Director: Lynn Chachkes
IEP Team Specialist: Ariba Khwaja

Ward Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-6450
Asst. Director: Lindsey Mueller
IEP Team Speicalist: Katelyn Smith

Williams Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-6480
Asst. Director: Lynn Chachkes
IEP Team Specialist: Michelle Gillis

Zervas Elementary School
Phone: (617) 559-6750
Asst. Director: Lindsey Mueller
IEP Team Specialist: Coral Rondeau

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Bigelow Middle School
Phone: (617) 559-6800
Asst. Principal for Student Services:
Jordanna L'Esperance

Day Middle School
Phone: (617) 559-9100
Asst. Principal for Student Services:
Nadine Clifford

Brown Middle School
Phone: (617) 559-6900
Asst. Principal for Student Services:
Samantha Murray

Oak Hill Middle School
Phone: (617) 559-9200
Asst. Principal for Student Services:
Mike Thurm

HIGH SCHOOLS

Newton North High School
Phone: (617) 559-6200
Department Head: Maura Tynes
Asst. Department Head: Katie Lindley
Asst. Department Head: Jenny Kang
IEP Team Specialist: Holly St. Peter

Newton South High School
Phone: (617) 559-6500
Department Head: Kimberley Borgida
Asst. Department Head: Jodie Whidden
IEP Team Specialist: Jaclyn Ehrhardt

Newton Central High School
Phone: (617) 559-6016
Director: Sarah Ladner-Apollo

Community Connections
Phone: (617) 559-9021
IEP Team Specialist: Lisa Goldthwaite Wright



Published: April 2026

RESOURCES
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I obtain more information regarding Special Education in Newton Public Schools?

For information regarding special education, please contact the Team Specialist located at your student's school. This information can be located on the Contact Information Page.

The guide below provides an overview of Special Education in Massachusetts including the Special Education laws, important timelines and disability types: A Parent's Guide to Special Education.

What resources are available regarding special education referrals, evaluation and eligibility?

The resources below provide a brief overview of the special education eligibility process which includes referral, evaluation planning, evaluation and eligibility determination.

- Massachusetts Referral, Evaluation, Eligibility Determination Guide
- Parent's Notice of Procedural Safeguards Homepage

For more information regarding referrals, evaluation and eligibility, please contact the Team Specialist located at your student's school. This information can be located on the Contact Information Page.

I have questions about students transitioning out of secondary education.

The links below include a quick reference guide regarding the transition process out of high school and more transition resources.

- NPS's Transition Planning Website & Contact Information
- Secondary Transition Planning Quick Reference Guide
- Secondary Transition Resources

How can families and schools resolve disputes?

Families and schools are encouraged to work together to resolve disputes.

Listed below are the options for dispute resolution within Massachusetts:

- 1) Parents/guardians bring the dispute to the attention of their child's school and/or district leaders.
- 2) A neutral mediator is appointed by contacting the BSEA (Bureau of Special Education Appeals) and works with both parties to talk about their disagreement and reach an agreed settlement.
- 3) File a state complaint with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary's (DESE) Problem Resolution Office.

For more information, please refer to Section 6 of the Parent's Notice of Procedural Safeguards Homepage.

For more resources please visit: DESE Families & Guardians Homepage.

Published: April 2026

RESOURCES
ENROLLMENT

Typical documents you will need to gather:

- [ ] Parent Photo Identification (Driver's License, Passport, or Government-Issued Photo ID)
- [ ] Proof of Age for Student (Proof of Age Statement, if needed)
- [ ] Proof of Residency/Occupancy (Families may submit a Residency Affidavit, if applicable.)
- [ ] Immunization Record and Physical Exam (State of MA, School Immunization Information)
    - Immunization records are required for entry to school. Enrollment will not be finalized without a current record or catch-up schedule.
        - Out-of-state and out-of-country immunization and physical documents are accepted
        - **Physical Exam Info for Incoming K Students:** Physical Examination Form, or Massachusetts School Health Record Form completed by a healthcare provider (must be dated within the past 12 months; can be submitted after enrollment). Physical exams must include physician documentation of vision & lead screening

Additional items, if available:

- Student Records/Transcripts/Report Cards
- Special Education: Individual Education Plan/Testing or 504 Plan
- Legal Guardianship/Caregiver Affidavit Documents
- Active Legal or Physical Custody Orders or Marriage Separation Agreements
- WIDA or language assessments

PRESCHOOL

Newton Early Childhood Program Enrollment
Phone: (617) 559-6050
Website: NECP Eligibility Page

ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

Family Welcome Center
Phone: (617) 559-6055
Email: enrollment@newton.k12.ma.us
Website: NPS Enrollment Homepage

ADDITIONAL ENROLLMENT RESOURCES

- In-person services are available, by appointment only, please visit the Family Welcome Center homepage or call (617) 559-6055 to schedule.
- Contact the Office for English Language Learners for language assistance by email elloffice@newton.k12.ma.us or phone (617) 559-6043.
- Technical Assistance: Please contact NPS tech support by email registrationtechsupport@newton.k12.ma.us.

Published: April 2026

RESOURCES
NEWTON SEPAC

SEPAC stands for Special Education Parent Advisory Council. In Massachusetts, every public school district is required by law to have a SEPAC to represent the voice of families of students with disabilities. SEPAC serves as a bridge between families and the school district—ensuring that parent perspectives help shape programs, services, and student outcomes. These dates are performed per the following MA laws:

- **Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71B Section 3:** This is part of Massachusetts' core special education law. It requires every school district to establish a Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) and to consult with that SEPAC on matters related to special education programs, policies, and planning.
- **603 CMR 28.07(4)** requires school districts to actively support and collaborate with their SEPACs by providing administrative support, holding regular meetings, encouraging parent participation, and partnering on special education program development—ensuring SEPACs are meaningful contributors, not just formal entities.

What we do:
- Advise the school district on special education programs, policies, and improvements
- Partner with district leadership to provide input on program development, budget priorities, and family engagement
- Provide a forum for parents and caregivers to share experiences, concerns, and ideas
- Offer resources and education about special education rights, services, and processes (such as IEPs)
- Advocate for students with disabilities to ensure equitable access and inclusion
- Build community among families navigating similar experiences

Who can join the SEPAC?
Membership in SEPAC is open to parents and guardians of students with disabilities, students, as well as other interested community members. While participation is broad, SEPACs are parent-led organizations that work in partnership with school districts to advise on special education programs and policies. No prior experience with special education is needed—whether you are new to the process or have years of experience, your voice is valuable.

Newton SEPAC is a network of families across Newton Public Schools and also supports families with students in out-of-district placements.
- Website: https://newtonpac.org
- Email: info@newtonsepac.org

How often do we meet?
- Open Board Meetings: Meet monthly (full schedule available on the website)
- Special Education Events: Typically held once per month, either via Zoom or in person during the school year
- School Committee Participation: Attend and contribute to meetings as needed

Newton SEPAC Leadership:
Please visit https://newtonpac.org for a current list of Newton SEPAC Board members and school and out-of-district liaisons.
- Chair: Sarah-Riccardi Swartz
- Secretary: Maka Bubashvilli
- Treasurer: Sri Sridhar
- Liaison Chair: Lindsay Klump
- Communications Chair: Open
- Program Chair: Sahar Zaheer
- Board Emeritae: Jenny Klein-Sosa & Eliza Spaulding

How can I connect with other families and resources?
- Please visit https://newtonpac.org find your school's SEPAC liaison, Google Gropu and WhatsApp communities
- Looking for confidential support or individualized help? Please email info@newtonsepac.org

How can I get involved?
- Attend a monthly meeting or event
- Join our Google Group to stay informed
- Connect with your school's SEPAC liaison and SEPAC Board
- Volunteer for a committee or help with events

Looking for more information? Please visit the Federation for Children with Special Needs, a not-for-profit that provides information, training, and one-on-one support to help families understand special education and related systems and effectively advocate for their children. They also build parent capacity and community through workshops, peer support, and partnerships with schools and SEPACs, strengthening family voice across the state.

Published: April 2026

RESOURCES
UNDERSTANDING THE IEP TIMELINE AND KEY STEPS

Quick Summary:

- **Referral and consent:** A consent form for evaluation must be sent to the parent within 5 working days (of the school calendar) from the public school to the parent. Consent starts the clock - timelines begin only once the parent(s) signs the forms and are returned back to the public school.
- **Evaluation & meeting:** Schools have 30 school days to evaluate and must hold a Team meeting within the next 15 school days (this should not exceed 45 days from the date of consent).
- **IEP Meeting:** Proposed IEP is sent within 2 school days of the meeting; Parents have 15 school days to respond**.**
- **Implementation & review:** Services begin after acceptance; schools must deliver services as written. Families will have an annual review of the IEP and a reevaluation for eligibility will occur at least every 3 years.

Detailed Notes about the IEP Timeline:

Step 1: Starting the Referral In Massachusetts
The special education process begins with a referral for evaluation, which can be made by either a parent or the school. Referrals should always be submitted in writing and may be made at any time. Please note: If a referral is made when school is not in session this does create an official record but the process does not begin until school is back in session. A public school cannot refuse to evaluate a student.

Step 2: Consent for Evaluations
After a referral is received, the school sends parents a Proposed Evaluation Plan along with a Consent to Evaluate form. Parents should review these carefully, ask questions if needed, and know that signing consent allows the evaluation to take place—it does not mean agreeing to special education services. Importantly, the legal timeline does not begin until the school receives signed parental consent.

Step 3: Complete Evaluations
Once consent is received, the school has 30 school days to complete the evaluations. These days do not include weekends, holidays, or school vacations. Evaluations may cover areas such as academics, cognitive functioning, speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, or other areas related to the student's needs.

Step 4: Team Meeting
Within the next 15 working days the team meeting must be scheduled (not to exceed 45 school days of receiving parental consent), the school must both complete the evaluations and hold a Team meeting (often called an eligibility or IEP meeting). At this meeting, the Team reviews evaluation results, determines whether the student is eligible for special education, and, if eligible, develops an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Parents are full members of the Team and should receive evaluation reports in advance whenever possible.

Step 5: Respond to the IEP
Following the meeting, the school sends a proposed IEP to parents within 2 school days after the Team Meeting. The IEP should clearly describe the student's services and supports, goals and accommodations, placement, and how progress will be measured. Parents then have 15 school days to respond. During this time, they may accept the IEP in full, reject parts of it, or reject it entirely and request further discussion. In most cases, services do not begin until the IEP—or at least the proposed services—has been accepted. If parents do not receive the IEP within that timeframe, they can (and should) follow up in writing, since the 15-school-day parent response period does not begin until the IEP is actually received. Importantly, this clock starts only after the proposed IEP is sent to and received by the parents, not on the date of the meeting.

Step 6 - Execute the IEP
Once accepted, the school must implement the IEP and begin services as soon as possible. Schools are legally required to deliver all services listed, and families are encouraged to document any missed services.

Ongoing Re-evaluation

- **Annual IEP Meetings:** Held once per year to review progress toward goals, update services and accommodations, and adjust the IEP based on the student's evolving needs. The full IEP Team participates, and a revised IEP is developed for the following year.
- **Reevaluation (Every 3 Years):** Massachusetts requires students receiving special education services to be reevaluated at least every three years to reassess eligibility. This includes updated evaluations, conducted with parent consent.
- **Parent or School-Initiated Meetings:** Additional meetings may be requested at any time by parents or school staff if concerns arise about progress or services. Schools are expected to respond and schedule these meetings within a reasonable time (typically 5–10 school days).
- **Transition Planning (Age 14+):** When the student receiving services is aged 14+, discussions start about their goals in transition planning to support post-secondary goals and incorporated into the IEP; there are many options including college, career, and independent living.

Published: April 2026

RESOURCES
WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENS AT AN IEP MEETING?

Quick Summary:

- A "Team Meeting" (often called an IEP meeting) is where parents and school staff come together to make decisions about a student's special education support plan. While it can feel formal, its purpose is collaborative: to review information, discuss a child's needs, and decide next steps.
- Parents can invite their advocate, attorney, private clinician (private BT, BCBA, other therapist) or a supportive friend to help them attend. Parents should inform the team in advance. Students can attend when appropriate.
- A translator can be requested ahead of the team meeting at the public school district's cost. The translator may be available in person, over the phone or over the computer through a virtual meeting format.
- The Meeting can be held in person or virtually. If meeting virtually, you should still receive all of the same documents you would have received at an in person meeting (including evaluations at least 2 days in advance) and a written meeting notice with a list of attendees.
- **How soon before the meeting are special education evaluations conducted provided to parents?** Schools are required to provide evaluations to students at least 2 days before the team meeting at a minimum.
- **Can the 1:1 aide / Behavioral Therapist attend the IEP?** Practices vary by district but typically 1:1 aides are not staffed to attend IEPs. However, a BCBA can be asked to share data collected and interaction summaries.

Detailed Notes About What Happens at an IEP Meeting:

- **Introductions to the IEP team members, purpose, vision statement:** The meeting begins with introductions and a brief explanation of why the Team is meeting (evaluation results, annual review, eligibility, transition planning, etc.). The student's vision statement and parent concerns (that you are asked to prepare in advance) are reviewed.
- **Review of evaluations and data:** The Team reviews evaluation results, progress data, teacher input, and parent concerns. Outside evaluations shared by parents must be discussed and considered.
- **Discussion of strengths and needs:** The Team talks about the student's strengths, challenges, and how the disability impacts learning and participation at school.
- **Eligibility determination:** The Team decides whether the student qualifies for special education under IDEA or for accommodations under Section 504. Eligibility determination is NOT needed to obtain a Section 504 plan.
    - **What happens if it is determined that the student does not qualify for a disability designation?** The team must share this determination with you and will send you this in writing within 10 working days. You can reject that determination of ineligibility in writing back to the school as well as soon as possible.
- **IEP development or review:** If the student is eligible, the Team develops the IEP. This includes goals, services, accommodations, placement, and how progress will be measured. The core of this item is the service delivery grid which outlines the services, frequency and amount of time for service and in which setting they are provided. Schools must use data to create goals and track progress towards those goals, not just grades or general observations. If progress is limited, the IEP may need to be revised.
- **Parent participation and questions:** Parents are equal members of the Team and may ask questions, share concerns, request changes, or ask for time to review information.
- **Next steps and timelines:** The meeting ends with a summary of decisions made, what will happen next, and any timelines (such as when the IEP will be sent and when services will begin). If the IEP involves switching IEP teams, ask for a clear plan and how you can get in touch with the new IEP team contacts. Ideally, they should be attending the IEP meeting with you to help answer any transition needs.

The IEP will be provided for review within 2 working days for Parents to fully approve, partially reject or entirely reject. Parents can also request a follow up meeting. If a student was previously receiving services, they will continue to receive their existing IEP services plan until a new IEP plan is approved (this is also called a "stay put" service model).

Published: April 2026

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES:

"The world needs different kinds of minds to work together."
Temple Grandin



Office of Student Services & Special Education
100 Walnut Street Newton, MA 02460
Phone: (617) 559-6000

NEWTON
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Where every student can thrive