

## SPECIAL EDUCATION HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS

Children can have all sorts of difficulties growing up. Sometimes, the problems are obvious right from the start; sometimes, they do not appear until the child is in school. Some children have problems learning to read and write. Others have difficulty remembering new information. Still others may have trouble with their behavior.

When a student is having trouble in school, it is important to find out why. The child may have a disability. By law, schools must provide special help to eligible students with disabilities. This help is called special education and related services.

This handbook is intended to help parents learn about the process of referring and identifying students who may be in need of special education and related services. We have broken the process down into the following steps to make the process easier to understand.

### **STEP 1. A child is identified as possibly needing special education and related services.**

There are two primary ways in which students are identified as possibly needing special education and related services: the system known as Child Find (which operates in each state) and by referral from a parent or school personnel.

**Child Find.** Each state is required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities in the state who need special education and related services. To do so, states conduct what are known as Child Find activities.

When a child is identified by Child Find as possibly having a disability and as needing special education, parents may be asked for permission to evaluate their child. Parents can also call the Special Education Director (372-6312) and ask that their child be evaluated if they suspect their child has a disability.

**Referral or request for evaluation.** A school professional may ask that a student be evaluated to see if they have a disability. Parents may also contact the student's teacher or other school professional to ask that their child be evaluated. Referrals must be in writing and can be as simple as a short note asking for your child (give the child's name) to be tested for special education and sign the letter. If you need help writing this letter of referral, ask your child's teacher or a special education teacher from your child's school to help you. See page 21 for some suggestions.

Once your written request for a referral to special education has been received by the school, a meeting will be arranged to discuss the concerns. Written consent from a parent or legal guardian is required before a child may be evaluated. The Maine Unified Special Education Regulations state that evaluations need to be completed within 45 school days after the Special Education Director receives the parent's written consent.

## **Step 2. Child is evaluated.**

Evaluation is a necessary early step in the special education process for a child. It is intended to answer the following questions:

Does the child have a disability that requires the provision of special education and related services?

What are the child's specific educational needs?

What special education services and related services are appropriate for addressing those needs?

By law, the initial evaluation of the child must be "full and individual", which is to say, focused on that child and that child alone. The evaluation must assess the child in all areas related to the child's suspected disability. Parents receive a copy of the evaluation results at least three (3) days prior to the meeting to review the results.

The evaluation results will be used to decide the child's eligibility for special education and related services and to make decisions about an appropriate educational program for the child.

## **Step 3. Eligibility is decided.**

A group of qualified individuals, including the parents and other professionals (the IEP Team) look at the child's evaluation results and data from school performance. Together, they decide if the child is a "child with a disability", as defined by IDEA. If the parents do not agree with the eligibility decision, they may ask for mediation or a hearing to challenge the decision.

If the child is found to be a child with a disability, as defined by IDEA, then they are eligible for special education and related services. Within 30 calendar days after the child is determined to be eligible, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team must meet to write an IEP for the child.

The school system schedules and conducts the IEP meeting. School staff must:

- contact the participants, including the parents, in writing;
- notify parents at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting to make sure they are present at the IEP meeting and have an opportunity to attend;
- schedule the meeting at a time and place mutually agreed to;
- inform the parents of the purpose, time and location of the meeting;
- inform the parents who will be attending; and
- inform the parents that they may invite people to the meeting who have knowledge or special expertise about the child.

The IEP Team meets to talk about the child's needs and to write the student's IEP. Parents and the student (when appropriate) are full participating members of the team and are involved in making the decisions.

Before the school system may provide special education and related services to the child for the first time, the parent must give initial consent in writing. The child begins to receive services no later than 30 days after parental consent for special education.

If parents do not give consent for placement, the child will not be able to receive special education services, even if the school disagrees.

If the parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement. If they still disagree, parents may meet with the Special Education Director, ask for mediation, or the school may offer mediation. Parents may file a complaint with the state Department of Education and may request a due process hearing, at which time, mediation must be available. This process may occur at any time that a child is receiving special education and related services.

#### **Step 4. After the IEP is written, services are provided.**

The school makes sure that the child's IEP is carried out as it was written as soon as possible following the IEP meeting, but no later than 30 days after the IEP Team's initial identification of the student as a child with a disability in need of special education and related services. Parents are given a copy of the IEP. Each of the student's teachers and service providers has access to the IEP and knows their specific responsibilities for carrying out the IEP. This includes the accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided, in keeping with the IEP. All identified students shall have a current IEP in effect at the start of the school year.

#### **Step 5. Progress is measured and reported to parents.**

The student's progress toward the annual goals is measured, as stated in the IEP. Their parents are regularly informed of their student's progress and whether that progress is enough for the student to achieve the goals by the end of the year. These progress reports should be received at the same times that report cards are issued for all students.

#### **Step 6. IEP is reviewed.**

The student's IEP is reviewed by the IEP team at least once per year, or more often if the parents or school ask for a review. If necessary, the IEP is revised. Parents are team members and must be invited to participate in these meetings. Parents can make suggestions for changes, can agree or disagree with the IEP Team, and agree or disagree with the placement. Concerns may also be discussed more informally through a case conference; the IEP may be amended.

If parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement. There are several options, including additional testing, meeting with Special Education Director, or asking for mediation or a due process hearing. Parents may also file a complaint with the state Department of Education if they believe a violation of the law has occurred.

### **Step 7. Child is re-evaluated.**

At least every three years, the child must be re-evaluated. This evaluation is often called a “triennial”. Its purpose is to find out if the child continues to be a child with a disability, as defined by IDEA, and what the child’s educational needs are. However, the child must be re-evaluated more often if conditions warrant or if the child’s parent or teacher asks for a new evaluation.

### **CATEGORIES OF ELIGIBILITY**

- Autism
- Deafness
- Developmental Delay (ages 3-5)
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Multiple Disabilities
- Speech and Language Disability
- Specific Learning Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injured
- Visual Impairment, including blindness

For more information on the eligibility categories in the Maine Unified Special Education Regulations, visit <http://www.maine.gov/education/speced/contentrules.htm>.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION TIMELINES

### An Overview for Parents

The chart below offers an overview of the special education process. It is not designed to show all steps or the specific details. It shows what happens from the time the child is referred for evaluation and is identified as having a disability, through the development of an individualized education program (IEP). The process begins when a referral for an initial evaluation is made by school staff, parents, etc.

Initial Referral: Parent, teacher, or other professional may make a referral.	Within 15 school days of the receipt of the written referral by the Special Education Director, a meeting must be held or Consent for Evaluation mailed home.
Meeting to discuss referral or Consent for Evaluation must be mailed to parents.	Within 15 school days of the receipt of the written referral by the Special Education Director, a meeting must be held or Consent for Evaluation mailed home.
Full Individual Evaluation Completed: Parents must receive the written evaluation reports at least 3 days prior to the IEP meeting.	Received by parent at least 3 days prior to meeting to review evaluations
Parents receive written notice of the IEP meeting at least 7 days prior to the IEP meeting.	Received by parent at least 7 days prior to IEP meetings
IEP meeting: To determine eligibility for special education and develop IEP if appropriate.  Consent for Initial Placement: Parents give written permission for special education services if appropriate.	Within 45 school days of signed parental consent to evaluate by the Special Education Director.
Special Education services begin within 30 days of identification and signed initial consent.	Within 30 calendar days
Annual Review of progress and IEP revisions	Within one year of identification and initial consent for placement.
Re-evaluation: At a minimum of every 3 years, the child is re-evaluated. Evaluations determined by the IEP Team.	Every 3 years

## DESCRIPTION OF EVALUATIONS

Evaluations will include what your child does well, areas of need or difficulty and how they may learn. This information is then used to decide if your child is eligible for special education services and helps build an Individualized Education Program (IEP) if your child is eligible. The information is also helpful for identifying general education accommodations if your child is not eligible for special education services. Some assessments can only be given once in a calendar year.

**Academic/Developmental Testing** is designed to determine what the student's academic/developmental progress is within specific academic areas; i.e., overall development, reading, math, and spelling. The student's learning and development achievement will be compared to the achievement of students in St. George School and students throughout the country.

**Intellectual Testing** involves the individual administration of intelligence tests. These tests are designed to measure different types of abilities, such as what the student can do and how they do it.

**Observation** is completed in the child's learning environment (including regular classroom setting) to document the child's academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty.

**Learning Development Testing** is designed to determine what the student's strengths and weaknesses are in terms of processing information.

**Speech/Language Testing** is designed to determine the student's communication skills in articulation, voice, fluency, expressive language, and receptive language.

**Psychological Evaluation** is designed to assess personality and/or behavioral functioning. Commonly used evaluation methods include parent and child interviews, personality inventories, behavior rating scales and projective tests, such as Behavior Assessment Scales for Children.

**Physical Therapy Evaluation** assesses a student's large motor development. Evaluations include, but are not limited to: range of motion, manual muscle assessment, functional skill performance, mobility in the environment, reflex integration development, muscle tone assessment, gross motor skills (e.g., balance, coordination, agility, skill refinement), and review of any equipment needs the student may have.

**Occupational Therapy Evaluation** addresses the functional needs of the student related to, but not limited to, the performance of: self-help skills, adaptive behavior and play, sensory development and integration, motor development and integration, and posture.

**Interest and Aptitude Assessment** is designed to determine strengths, weaknesses and interests as they relate to vocational preparation and choice.

**Additional Assessments** are designed to collect essential information on health, social or developmental history, behavior (may be completed by an interview with the parents, school personnel or the child), or sensory assessment in vision or hearing.

**Other:** There may be other types of assessments that would give valuable information, such as an interview with the student or a structured developmental history.

**Common Assessments** (used throughout the district for all students): An assessment created to evaluate all students from the same grade level or course. Examples include: Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), District Writing Prompt, Northwest Educational Assessment (NWEA), New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT).

The IEP Team may identify accommodations or modifications for common assessments. However, each test has a specific set of allowable accommodations and the support used for instruction may not be adopted for some tests.

## A PARENT CHECKLIST FOR IEP MEETING PREPARATION

You are an important member of the IEP team. You know your child better than any other member of the team and can provide important information and insight about your child. Just as the other members will prepare for the IEP meeting, you must also take time to prepare. Use this list as a guideline to prepare for the meeting.

- Read your advance written notice to see what issues will be discussed and who will attend.
- Be sure enough time is allotted for the meeting and be willing to schedule a second meeting if needed.
- Ask the school for copies of any relevant information you do not already have, including: latest comprehensive individual assessments and any new testing the school has done;
- Progress notes or updates on IEP goals.
- Gather any reports you have from outside therapists, tutors, consultants, or doctors and provide a copy of these to the school to review prior to the IEP meeting if you would like to share them.
- Make a list of your child's strengths.
- Make a list of your child's needs. Make a list of other things you would like your child to learn during the year. How is this going to help them Will they be able to participate more fully in school life? Will they become more independent? How will their life change or improve? These will be the basis for developing their IEP goals during the IEP meetings.
- Make a list of their areas of functioning that would increase with assistive technology (communication, mobility, etc.) or accommodations. Be prepared to make requests for accommodations if needed.
- Decide who you will bring with you to the IEP meeting. You must notify the school if you will be bringing an attorney to your IEP meeting. The school district will want to have their attorney present as well.
- Decide if you want to meet with the teacher(s) or diagnostic specialist before the IEP meeting.
- If you want to record the IEP meeting, gather equipment, including recorder, several high quality tapes, new batteries, and an extension cord. It would be a good idea to let the school know that you are going to record the IEP meeting, so they can have their recorder ready before the IEP meeting.
- Make list of questions or things you don't understand about special education.
- If your child is attending the IEP meeting, explain to them what the meeting is going to be like (who are the people, the purpose of the meeting). Discuss what they can do if they become uncomfortable (ask to leave, wait in the hall, or go back to class).
- Contact the special education teacher, principal, or Special Education Director if you have questions.
- If you don't understand something during the meeting, ask questions.

## WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT?

**Making a referral:** A referral, in writing, can be given to the school staff at your child's school (classroom teacher, principal, special education teacher, etc.). The referral is then sent to the Special Education Director. Once signed by the Director, it becomes an official referral.

### **St. George School Special Education Complaint Procedure:**

St. George School believes that problems are best solved as close to the source as possible. Therefore, parents with concerns about their child's special education services are encouraged to take the following steps:

First, meet with your child's special education teacher. Talk honestly about your concerns and what you hope will happen. Seek ways in which you can work with the teacher to help your child.

If this does not resolve your concerns, meet with the principal.

If this is not satisfactory, meet with the Special Education Director/ Superintendent of Schools.

If you intend to request a due process hearing, you must first participate in a Resolution Meeting with District personnel.

Finally, if St. George School personnel cannot help you solve the problem, you should seek mediation through the Department of Education's complaint management system at (207) 624-6650. You may also request a complaint investigation or due process hearing; both of these procedures are more complicated than mediation.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

St. George School  
65 Main St.  
PO Box 153  
Tenants Harbor, ME 04860  
(207) 372-6312

## CONTINUUM OF SERVICE OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Services for students with disabilities will vary from student to student, depending upon the child's strengths and weaknesses. In all cases, final determination of educational services for a student with disabilities will depend upon the identified needs of the student, as determined by the IEP team.

In selecting the least restrictive environment, consideration is given to any potentially harmful effects of the suggested service on the student and the rights of the student to be educated with chronological peers (same-age students).

A continuum of services is available to meet the individual needs of students including, but not limited to, the following:

**General Education with consultation:** The student is served in the general education classroom without any accommodations or modification to the curriculum, instruction, testing or grading. The special education teacher is responsible for consulting with the teacher(s) and monitoring the student's progress according to the IEP, or as determined by the IEP team. Example: A student fully participates in the 5th grade general education math class without modifications or accommodations. The special education teacher meets with the general education teacher once a month to make sure the student continues to make progress in the general education curriculum.

**General Education with consultation/accommodations:** The student is served in the general education classroom with consultation and support from the special education teacher. The general education teacher is responsible for direct instruction, testing, grading and behavioral management as specified in the IEP. The special education teacher may assist the general education teacher by designing and making material adaptation and accommodations, etc. Example: A student participates in the 8th grade general education science program with accommodations that allow for shortened assignments and tests/assignments read to the student orally.

**General Education with direct special education support in the classroom:** The student receives special education support for the general education curriculum in the general education setting. The special education teacher, therapist, or trained educational technician will be in the general education classroom to provide direct instruction, instructional support, or other assistance to the student or a group of students. Example: A 2nd grade student participates in the classroom that has an educational technician supporting the teacher.

**General Education with direct special education support outside the classroom:** The student receives special education support for the general education curriculum outside the general education setting. When the services cannot be appropriately provided in the general education setting, the student may receive the selected services that they need in a separate special education setting. Example: An 11th grade student receives their English credit by participating in an English class in the Resource Room with a special education teacher.

**Separate Special Education services:** The student is served in a separate special education setting outside of the general education classroom for the majority of the day. The student has significant special education needs that cannot be satisfactorily achieved in a less restrictive setting. Example: A 4th

grade student receives reading, writing, math, social studies, and science instruction in a special education setting and participates in physical education and recess with his peers without disabilities.

**Out of District Placement:** The student is served in a specialized school specifically designed to address special learning or behavioral needs. The student has significant special education needs that cannot be satisfactorily achieved in their public school setting. Example: A 7th grade student receives all of their education in a private school setting.

## Common Terms in Special Education

**Adaptive Behavior Scales:** checklists that provide information relating to the attainment of skills that lead to independent functioning as an adult

**Accommodations:** changes in the manner in which instruction and assessments are delivered that does not alter the curriculum level expectation being measured or taught

**Amendment:** a change to the existing IEP, such as increasing speech services from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. An amendment is made to the plan after consultation with team members.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** 1990 Federal legislation enacted to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability

**Annual Goal(s):** Annual goals are those goals written in a student's IEP that the school personnel assist the students in striving to meet for the coming year. The goals must be measurable and relate to those areas with which the student has difficulty. Annual goals are reviewed once a year (Annual Review) and revised as needed.

**Annual Review:** A meeting is conducted for every special education student each year. The IEP team convenes and reviews the student's progress on the IEP for the preceding year by reviewing the student data, as well as revising the IEP to meet the student's needs for the upcoming school year. The meeting must be held no later than one year from the last Annual Review or the original development of the IEP.

**Assistive Technology:** This term refers to special technology that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability. The disabilities can be either physical, academic, or cognitive. Examples of assistive technology include things as simple as pencil grasps, computer programs such as those that assist with reading and typing, programs that magnify the screen, phonic hearing devices, special communication switches, and special keyboards. This technology does not limit itself to items used with a computer. Assistive technology determinations begin with low technology and move to higher technology only if needed. The term does not include eyeglasses, hearing aids, or medical devices.

**Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):** a document created for special education students who are experiencing behavioral difficulties. The document details the behavior or concern and the steps the special education teacher and school staff will take to help the student acquire more appropriate behaviors. A BIP is often created following the implementation and results of a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), but can be developed at any time that a need is identified.

**Case Conference:** an informal meeting where the child's team may discuss concerns about a child. If the team feels a change needs to be made to the IEP, the IEP may be amended. A parent may request a case conference at any time.

**Cognitive/Intellectual Assessment:** a test that measures a wide range of abilities, including attention, memory, problem-solving, language skills and intellectual functioning. It is the process of determining a student's cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

**Confidentiality:** Special education students' identifying information and educational information can be shared only with those school personnel who have an educational interest in that student for the current school year. Information about special education students or their parents cannot be shared with those who are not educationally involved with the students.

**Educational Assessment:** a test that measures areas of knowledge or skills, such as basic reading; reading comprehension; mathematics calculation, reasoning and application; oral expression; listening comprehension; and learning preference and style.

**Extended School Year:** required under the IDEA for students who experience regression or limited recoupment of previously learned material. These services are provided when it is likely that your child will significantly lose skills during a break in school services and is not likely to recoup those skills in a reasonable amount of time. Your child's performance data is used to show there are regression and recoupment problems.

**Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** a federal law protecting the privacy of students and families in the collection, maintenance, use, and destruction of educational records.

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):** public education provided at no cost to the parent and in accordance with an Individual Education Program.

**Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA):** a school-based process used by the Individual Education Program (IEP) Team to hypothesize why a child engages in challenging behaviors and how the behavior relates to the child's environment. A series of observations and questionnaires are compiled into a report, the purpose of which is to determine the function of a student's inappropriate behavior. FBAs can be conducted any time an IEP team has concerns about a student's behavior.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** a federal law requiring states to provide eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** a document required by law for every student who receives special education. The program outlines the child's needs, abilities, and individual goals for the student, as well as documents how and what special education services will assist with meeting those goals. The IEP goals target the student's weakest area(s). No IEP is a guarantee of success; it is a best faith plan to improve performance.

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP):** a written document that describes the early intervention services for infants through toddlers (Birth-2 years of age) who have a disability

**Individualized Service Plan:** a plan similar to an IEP that outlines the services a district will make available to a student who is parentally placed in a private school or is home schooled (if requested)

**Intervention:** any method, strategy, material, or environmental change that is used by a regular education teacher to accommodate the struggling student in the general education program

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** School districts are required to educate students with disabilities in regular classrooms with their peers without disabilities and in the school they would attend if not disabled, to the maximum extent appropriate.

**Manifestation Determination:** a process to determine if a student's specific behavior was or was not caused by the student's disability. A Manifestation Determination is completed as part of an IEP team meeting.

**Mediation:** a process in which the parent(s) or guardian(s) of a student with a disability and a representative of the school district meet with a mediator who is an independent person. By asking questions and discussing all information with both parties, the mediator helps the parent(s) and the school district representation resolve disagreements, reach a more complete understanding of each other's concerns, and agree upon the special education program for the student in a cooperative and timely manner.

**Modifications:** changes in the regular education curriculum and/or assessment that lower the standards of the curriculum to meet the needs of the student. Modifications are made when the expectations are beyond the student's level of ability. Modifications may be minimal or very complex, depending on the student's performance. Example: student may only be expected to learn ½ of the spelling words.

**New England Common Assessments Program:** The NECAP tests measure students' academic knowledge and skills relative to grade expectations.

**Occupational Therapy (OT):** a related service associated with the improvement of fine motor, sensory, and daily living skills

**Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP):** the federal office responsible for administering programs and requirements under the IDEA

**Physical Therapy (PT):** a related service associated with the improvement of gross motor skills and coordination

**Personalized Alternative Assessment Portfolio (PAAP):** the alternative to Maine's required state science assessment designed specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities. The IEP team determines if this is appropriate.

**Pre-referral:** Pre-referral procedures are general education procedures involving regular benchmark assessments of all children, using Curriculum-Based Measurements (CMB) to monitor children's progress and identify those children who are at risk of failing. Children who are at risk receive responsive interventions in the general education program that attempt to resolve the presenting problems of concern. General educators are encouraged to confer with specialists and teaching professionals, but general education personnel are responsible for the implementation of the intervention.

**Rating Scales:** provide information for comparing the targeted behavior(s) to other students. Developmental Scales provide information related to areas of child growth and development and allow comparisons to be made between developmental levels of one student and others of the same age.

**Re-evaluation:** a process required by law to re-evaluate special education students. The purpose of the re-evaluation is to determine whether special education continues to be appropriate for the student and to help determine the child's strengths and needs. The IEP team determines the components of the re-evaluation. A re-evaluation shall occur not more frequently than once per year unless the parent and the local educational agency agree otherwise and at least once every three years unless the parent and local educational agency agree that a re-evaluation is unnecessary.

**Referral:** The special education referral is the first step of the special education process. Any student who needs or is believed to need special education or related services in order to receive a free and appropriate public education may be referred by a teacher, parent or other individual or agency representative with knowledge of the child. Referrals for special education testing should be submitted to the school in writing, and parents or teachers making referrals should keep a copy of the written request.

**Related Services:** services designed to support delivery of special education direct instruction and are necessary for a child to achieve the special education goals. Examples of related services include speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and rehabilitation counseling.

**Resource Room:** part-time special education instruction that is given to a student outside of the regular classroom. Resource instruction time can vary per student and is dependent of their individual needs.

**Response to Intervention (RTI):** Response to Intervention is a general education process designed to help all students at risk of academic and behavioral difficulties. It requires a multi-step process of providing intervention and supports to students who struggle to meet appropriate academic and behavioral benchmarks. RTI is a preventative measure that provides assistance to students early when they begin to struggle. It may be a part of the pre-referral process. It is required to be a part of the pre-referral procedure for many disabilities.

**Short-term Objectives:** Only students who are participating in the PAAP require short-term objectives. These are similar, measurable steps that assist the student in meeting an overall annual goal. Each annual goal (See Annual Goal) may consist of short-term objectives. Short-term objectives should be written in such a way that accurate and consistent measurement can be taken of the student's progress on the objective. The objective should also document criteria for what is considered successful accomplishment of the objective.

**Specially Designed Instruction (SDI):** adapting, as appropriate, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child with a disability to ensure access to the general curriculum.

**State Educational Agency (SEA):** agency in the state responsible for overseeing public education (i.e., Maine Department of Education)

**Supplementary Aids and Services:** aids, services and supports that are provided in regular education classes that enable children with disabilities to be educated within nondisabled children to the maximum extent possible.

**Transition:** a coordinate set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed within an outcome-oriented process, promotes movement from school to post-school activities, and is based on the student's needs. A transition plan is required in Maine beginning at the age of 14.

**Written Notice:** required written notice to parents when the school proposes to initiate or change or refuses to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION LANGUAGE**

Acronyms like IEP, IFSP, IDEA, and FAPE are common in special education. Feel free to ask what a specific term means. Here are a few examples.

**ABA** Applied Behavior Analysis

**ADA** Americans with Disabilities Act

**ADD** Attention Deficit Disorder

**ADHD** Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

**ASD** Autism Spectrum Disorder

**AT** Assistive Technology

**AYP** Adequate Yearly Progress

**BIP** Behavior Intervention Plan

**CBM** Curriculum-Based Measurement

**DHHS** Department of Health and Human Services

**DIBELS** Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

**DTT** Discrete Trial Testing

**ED** Emotional Disability

**ELL** English Language Learners

**ESY** Extended School Year (also known as EYS – Extended Year Services)

**FAPE** Free Appropriate Public Education

**FBA** Functional Behavior Assessment

**FERPA** Family Education Rights and Privacy Act

**IAES** Interim Alternative Educational Setting

**IASA** Improving America's Schools Act

**ID** Intellectual Disability (formerly referred to Mental Retardation)

**IDEA** Individuals with Disabilities Act

**IEE** Independent Educational Evaluation

**IEP** Individualized Education Program

**IQ** Intelligence Quotient

**LEP** Limited English Proficiency

**LRE** Least Restrictive Environment

**LREA** Least Restrictive Educational Alternative

**MACECD** Maine Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities

**MADSEC** Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities

**MD** Multiple Disabilities

**MDOE** Maine Department of Education

**MPF** Maine Parent Federation

**MSU** Municipal School Unit

**MUSER** Maine Unified Special Education Regulations

**NAEP** National Assessment of Educational Progress

**NCLB** No Child Left Behind

**NECAP** New England Common Assessment Program

**OCD** Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

**OCR** Office of Civil Rights

**ODD** Oppositional Defiant Disorder

**OHI** Other Health Impairment

**OI** Orthopedic Impairment

**OSEP** Office of Special Education Programs

**OSERS** Office of Special Education & Rehabilitative Services

**USDOE** United States Department of Education

**OT** Occupational Therapy

**RSU** Regional School Unit

**RTI** Response to Intervention

**SAT** Student Assistance Team

**SATs** Scholastic Aptitude Tests

**SAU** School Administrative Unit

**SEA** State Educational Agency

**SLD** Specific Learning Disability

**SNOW** Strengths, Needs, Opportunities and Worries

**SSDI** Social Security Disability Income

**TBI** Traumatic Brain Injury

**TDD** Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf

**TTY** Teletypewriter

**VI** Visual Impairment

**VR** Vocational Rehabilitation

## **SAMPLE LETTERS**

Throughout your child's school years, there is always a need to communicate with the school (teachers, administrators and others concerned with your child's education).

There are also times when the school needs to communicate with you. This is particularly true when your child has a disability and is receiving special education services. Some of this communication is informal, such as phone calls, comments in your child's notebook, a chat when picking up your child from school, or at a school function. Other forms of communication are more formal and need to be written.

Letters provide both you and the school with a record of ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Putting your thoughts on paper gives you the opportunity to take as long as you need to:

- state your concerns,
- think over what you have written,
- make changes, and
- have someone else read over the letter and make suggestions.

Letters also give people the opportunity to go over what has been suggested or discussed. A lot of confusion and misunderstanding can be avoided by writing down thoughts and ideas.

## Sample Letter 1: Discussing a problem

Your Mailing Address

Your City, State and Zip Code

Today's date (month, day and year)

Name of Principal

Name of School

Address of School

City, State and Zip Code

Dear (Principal's Name),

In this paragraph, say who you are, give your child's full name and their current class placement. Say something positive about your child's situation here before you state your reason for writing.

BRIEFLY explain why you are writing. Give **relevant** history and facts that support your concerns. (For example, your third grader is struggling in school, and you want to ask for help. You might say that your child's schoolwork has been getting worse throughout the year. That fact is relevant. Talking about something from your child's infancy probably is not.)

In this paragraph, state what you would like to have happen or what you would like to see changed. You may BRIEFLY say what you would **not** like or what has been tried and not worked. However, spend most of this paragraph saying what you want.

Say what type of response you would prefer. Do you need to meet with someone? Do you want a return letter or a phone call? Do you want a meeting?

Finally, give your daytime telephone number and state that you look forward to hearing from the person soon or give a reasonable date ("Please respond by the 15th.") End the letter with "Thank you for your attention to this matter."

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: your child's teacher

(Note: the "cc" at the bottom of the letter means you are sending a copy of this letter to the people listed. If you write to the Special Education Director about a problem at your child's school, you should send a copy to the principal. If you write to the principal about a problem, you should send a copy to your child's teacher. This lets people involved know your concerns and that you are taking steps to resolve the concerns.)

***Always keep a copy of your letter.***

## Sample Letter 2: Requesting an Initial Evaluation/Referral for Special Education

Your Mailing Address

Your City, State and Zip Code

Today's date (month, day and year)

Name of Principal or Special Education Director

Name of School

Address of School

City, State and Zip Code

Dear (Principal's or Administrator's Name),

I am writing to request that my child, (child's name), be evaluated for special education services. I am worried that (child's name) is not doing well and believe they may need special services in order to learn. (Child's name) is in the (grade) at (name of school). (Teacher's name) is their teacher.

Specifically, I am worried because (child's name) does/does not (give a few direct examples of your child's problems at school).

We have tried the following to help (child's name):\_\_\_\_\_. (If you or the school have done anything extra to help your child, briefly state it here.)

I understand that I have to give written permission in order for (child's name) to be evaluated. Before the evaluation begins, I have some questions about the process that I need to have answered (list questions you may have). I would be happy to talk with you about (child's name). You can send me information or call me during the day at (daytime phone number). Thank you for your prompt attention to my request.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: your child's principal (if letter is addressed to another administrator)

your child's teacher(s)

(Note: If your child has been identified as having a disability by professionals outside the school system, add the following sentence to the end of the first paragraph above:

(Child's name) has been identified as having (name of disability) by (name of professional).

Enclosed is a copy of the report I have received that explains (child's name) condition.

### **Sample Letter 3: Requesting your child's records**

Your Mailing Address

Your City, State and Zip Code

Today's date (month, day and year)

Name of Person to Whom You Are Writing

Name of School

Address of School

City, State and Zip Code

Dear (Name),

I am writing to schedule a time to come and review all of my child's records. My child, (child's name), is in (grade) in (teacher's name) class. I will also need copies of some or all of these records.

Please let me know where and when I can come in to see the records. I need these records by (date). You can reach me during the day at (phone number).

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Your name

#### **Sample Letter 4: Requesting an IEP Team Meeting**

Your Mailing Address

Your City, State and Zip Code

Today's date (month, day and year)

Name of your child's special education teacher

Name of School

Address of School

City, State and Zip Code

Dear (Teacher's name),

I am writing to request an IEP review meeting. I would like to discuss making some possible changes in (child's name)'s IEP. I am concerned about (state your reasons, but don't go into detail about the specific changes you want to make. Save those for the meeting).

I would also like to have (names of specialists or other staff) attend. I think their/their ideas about the changes we may need to make will be valuable.

I can arrange to meet with you and the other members of the IEP team on (give several suggested days) between (give a range of time, such as between 2:00 and 4:00). Please let me know what time would be best for you.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. My daytime phone number is (give your number). Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: specialists or other staff

## RESOURCES

If you have further questions about Special Education, feel free to contact:

St. George School  
Director of Special Education  
372-6312

Maine Parent Federation  
1-800-870-7746 (statewide) or email [parentconnect@mpf.org](mailto:parentconnect@mpf.org)  
[www.mpf.org](http://www.mpf.org)