

School and Education Resources

How to get your child tested for special education

This handout provides resources and recommendations for how to request special education testing for your child.

What is Special Education?

Special education is specially designed instruction for students with support needs that go beyond what is offered in the regular classroom. It meets the individual needs of the child that arise from a disability. These services can include specially trained staff, special instructional supplies and materials, modified curriculum and other special accommodations. Special education is provided at no cost for eligible students.

The range of special education support varies based on the child's needs and the school district. Each country, state or school district has different policies, rules, regulations and laws that govern what special education is. In the US, the governing law is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Who is eligible for special education services?

Students qualify for special education by meeting requirements set by the Washington State Department of Education. Students are tested to find out if they qualify in one or more of these disability areas:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH)
- Deaf-Blindness (DB)
- Developmental Delay/ Intellectually Impaired
- Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD)
- Other Health Impairments (OHI)
- Physically Impaired (PI)
- Multiply Impaired (MI)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Speech or Language Impairments (S/L)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Visually Impaired (VI)

It is possible to meet the requirements of a disability and not need special education services. For example, a child with a hearing loss who is doing well in the regular classroom may not need special education. The district may still be required, under a Section 504 plan, to make accommodations that allow the student to use general education services.

To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine
206-987-2164
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

How do I refer my child for special education testing?

You can submit a request for special education testing in writing or verbally to your child's general education teacher or the school psychologist. The referrals for special education testing go through the schools Guidance Team which includes the building administrator, special education teacher, general education teacher, school psychologist and other designated school staff. Follow the recommendations below for submitting your referral.

Write a letter of referral for the Guidance Team or make a verbal request for a meeting with the Guidance Team

If you submit your request verbally, write down who you make the request to and the date that you ask for the meeting. If you submit your request in writing, type or neatly write your request in a business-style letter or on a district form. Contact your child's teacher, principal, counselor or school psychologist to find out if a form is needed and where to get a copy. Submit the request in person even if you are doing it in writing. Keep a copy of the written referral.

Then, the Guidance Team will schedule a meeting with you to discuss your child's learning needs and decide if they should be tested. It may take a month or more for a meeting to be scheduled with the Guidance Team.

What to include in the referral

- Your mailing address, daytime and evening telephone numbers
- Your child's name, birth date, school, and grade
- A description of your child's learning problems
- Copies of additional information about your child's learning problems such as test results, grades, information from a doctor or outside assessments
- A statement that you are making a referral for testing and are requesting an Individual Education Program team meeting to discuss the referral
- Several dates and times you are available to meet with school staff

What to Avoid

- Lengthy letters - Keep your letter under 2 pages, double-spaced.
- Expressing anger or making accusations - Keep your tone professional.
- Including personal details - Focus on your child's learning needs. If there are other matters affecting your child, such as a recent divorce or death in the family, you will have a chance to share them with the IEP team, counselor or school psychologist in person.

Sample referral letter

Your Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Daytime telephone number

Name of Principal or Special Education Administrator
Name of School
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

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

I am writing to request that my son/daughter, (child's name), be evaluated for special education services (mention specific areas, e.g., reading, arithmetic, writing, language skills, adaptive behavior, social behavior, attention). I am worried that (child's name) is not doing well in school and believe he/she may need special services in order to learn. (Child's name) is in the (_) grade at (name of school). (Teacher's name) is his/her 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 any 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 telephone number). Thank you for your prompt attention to my request.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: your child's principal (if letter is addressed to an administrator) and your child's teacher(s)

Resources

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

www.k12.wa.us

360-725-6075

The OSPI provides families with information about special education, ensures that students and families know about their rights, and answers questions they may have about how the process works.

Special Education Resources

pc2online.org

For a more comprehensive list of resources available in Pierce County and Washington State, visit the Pierce County Parent Coalition for Developmental Disabilities Web site or call 253-564-0707 and ask for a free copy of their most current "Resource Guide."

The Arc of Washington State

arcwa.org

Phone: 360-357-5596 or 1-888-754-8798 (calls from WA state only)

Services and programs for people with developmental disabilities, such as autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and related neurological disorders that occur before age 18.

Council for Exceptional Children

exceptionalchildren.org

703-620-3660

International professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities and/or the gifted.

PAVE, Parents Are Vital in Education

wapave.org

253-565-2266 or 1-800-572-7368

A parent-directed organization to increase independence and future opportunities for people with special needs, their families and communities, through training, information, referral and support.