

A Guide To Preschool* Special Education



*(Ages 3-5 years)

1999

**THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DIRECTION CENTER
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
805 SOUTH CROUSE AVENUE
SYRACUSE, NY 13244-2280
315-443-4444 1-800-962-5488**

Dear Parents:

The purpose of this handbook is to help you understand the process of accessing preschool special education services and become a knowledgeable advocate for your child. We take you step-by-step through the process.

As with any handbook, this is not intended to provide the total in-depth information you may need to know about special education law. Rather the intent of this handbook is to provide a starting point and a foundation for understanding the process and to clarify some terms that are unique to special education.

The Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) is here to help you with all the stages of this process. It may sound complicated, but if your child qualifies and needs the extra help, the programs and services are very useful.

Call the ECDC (315-443-4444 or 800-962-5488) if you need help figuring out any part of this process, or if you want more information about how to make a referral.

Special thanks to Rachael Zubal for all her help with the design and production of this booklet.

HOW SPECIAL SERVICES ARE PROVIDED TO PRESCHOOLERS

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

Developmental problems can occur in any of these areas:

- language (talking and understanding)
- motor (walking and movement)
- hearing
- visual
- other

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

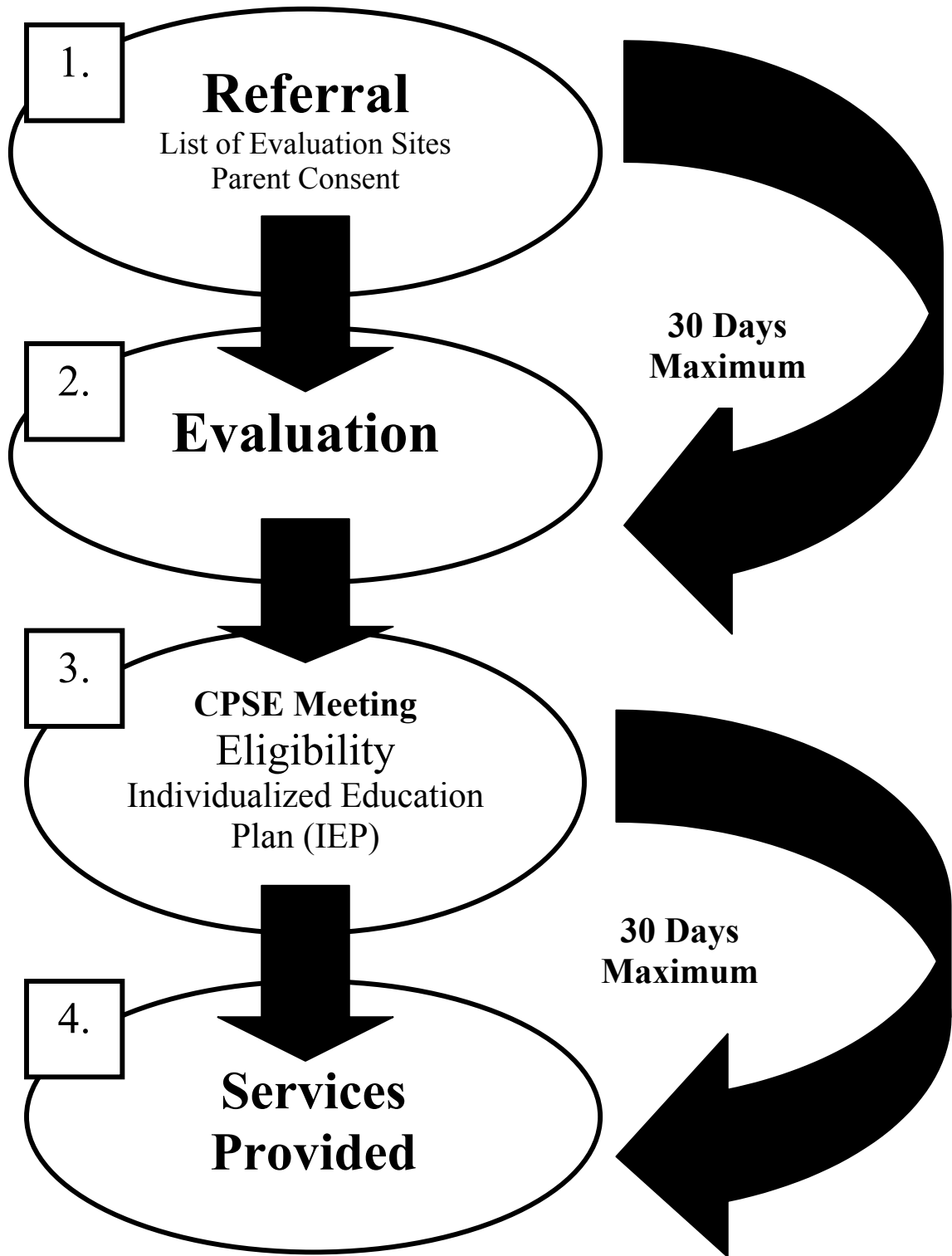
Preschool special education includes evaluation and a variety of special services. There are many choices as to where and how special services can be provided. You have a say in what happens. The special services your child receives are developed by the CPSE. The Committee consists of you, the chairperson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

You can bring along anyone else you think can be helpful.

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

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

The CPSE Process



The Preschool Special Education Process

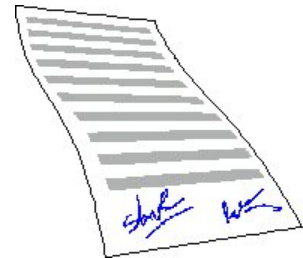


REFERRAL: Send a written referral to the child's school district expressing a need for a free, multidisciplinary evaluation (for an example of a sample letter, see page 6). Referrals can come from a variety of places including parents, doctors, ECDCs, or social services case workers.

COMMITTEE ON PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION

(CPSE): Upon receiving the written request/referral the school district must respond immediately. They will send an information package with a list of evaluation sites, parent rights and a **CONSENT FORM** to the parents.

CONSENT FOR EVALUATION: The **CONSENT FORM** must be returned to the school district stating the preference for an evaluation site. The ECDC can help with this selection.

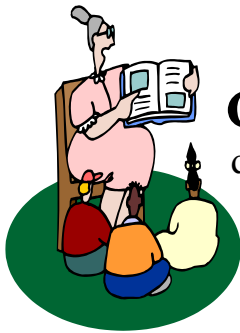


When the CPSE receives the written consent form, the process begins. Within 30 school days the evaluation and CPSE meeting occur. **The referral goes no further until the parents sign and return the consent form.**



EVALUATION: The CPSE Chair notifies the chosen evaluation site. An evaluation for the child will be scheduled.

CPSE MEETING: After the evaluation, the CPSE will meet with you. Remember you are a part of the CPSE team now. You can bring anyone you choose with you to the meeting. At the meeting you will discuss the results of the evaluation and determine if your child is eligible for services (see page 20). If he/she is eligible, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be developed by you and the rest of the team. Goals and services for your child will be spelled out. The IEP should also say how and when the providers will communicate with you.



CHILD RECEIVES SERVICES: Within 30 school days from the CPSE meeting the child should be receiving the services agreed to at the meeting. The county arranges transportation if it is necessary.

PARENTS' NOTES:

Sample Letter

Dear _____:
(chairperson of CPSE)

I would like to refer my child _____ to the Preschool Special
(name)

Education Program. My child's birthdate is _____ and, I am concerned
(date)

that he/she may have some developmental problems. I understand that I will be contacted by someone from the CPSE. It is my further understanding that this person will explain the program to me and can help me choose an evaluator from a list that will be provided.

The best time to reach me is on _____, _____.
(date) (time)

Sincerely,

(name)

(street)

(city/county/zip)

(phone)

WHAT IS AN EVALUATION?

Evaluation refers to a careful examination of a child's skills, strengths and weak areas in order to determine current levels of functioning and how best to plan for the child. An evaluation procedure consists of gathering information through observation, family interviewing, and testing.



OBSERVATION: Sometimes the evaluator will come to the day care center or preschool and see how the child is relating and performing. Other evaluators will call the child-care professional to gather information about specific concerns, behaviors, previous screenings and general thoughts about how the child is performing at the center.

FAMILY INTERVIEWING: Much of the same information is gathered from the child's family. What questions do they want addressed? How does the child act at home? How has the child developed over the years? Parents' input (i.e., their view of the strengths, needs, and personality) of their child is a very important piece of the evaluation process.



TESTING: The formal testing includes all areas of development:



motor....moving, using his/her body, using "fine muscles" for tasks like grasping

cognition....thinking, figuring things out, problem solving





speech/language....talking, understanding, communicating

adaptive....self-help in areas like dressing and eating



social/emotional....getting along with others, coping

physical....general health overview



The reports that are received as a result of the evaluation should give a clear idea about how a child is functioning in the key areas of development. What can he/she do? What does he/she like to do? What kinds of things should he/she be encouraged to do next? What do you as a parent want for him/her?



The answers to these questions are the foundation of an IEP. The plan consists of goals based on developmental scales and a child's particular needs and strengths. These goals are reached by carefully mapping out activities using toys, exercises, games, etc. to help the child move toward new goals...one step at a time. Many of the activities can be part of the young child's normal day, during bath time, feeding time, or grocery shopping. Most can be incorporated into the child-care setting's range of activities. Early childhood teachers, parents and various specialists (such as speech pathologists, psychologists, physical therapists and teachers) team together to plan and carry out an appropriate program.

AT YOUR CPSE MEETING

After your child's evaluation is reviewed, and he/she is eligible, the committee will begin to talk about the services that can be offered. You may want to think about your feelings and opinions about the following questions. All of these issues can and should be dealt with at your CPSE meeting. Your views and priorities for your child are important and should guide the meeting!

- What skills would you most like your child to learn?
- Are there concerns about your child's functioning at home that could be helped by work at school? (toilet training? self-help? talking/communicating?)



- Are there aspects of your child's behavior that you believe need to be improved?
- What do you believe to be your child's strengths and weaknesses?
- What methods have you found to be effective in rewarding or disciplining your child?
- To what extent does your child interact with children in the neighborhood? Do you want help increasing your child's social skills?
- What are your feelings about providing opportunities for your child to interact with "typical" children (i.e., those children who have not been identified as having any special needs)?
- How can you and the school work together to address these concerns?



OTHER QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE



Write down any additional questions you may have about your child's program, the people who will be working with him/her, what activities and supports there are for you, *or anything else you are wondering about!!*

QUESTIONS:

AND FINALLY...

Don't agree to the CPSE recommendations until you are sure you understand them. You should leave the meeting with a clear understanding of :

- your child's strong and weak areas
- the goals for the year
- the methods and services that will be used to reach these goals
- how the teacher/therapists will keep you informed about how things are going.
- If you disagree, ask to meet again if necessary and put your concerns in writing.

You Belong on the Team



It is the law: your child's education plan (the "IEP") is to be developed by a **team** (the CPSE) that includes you, another parent of a child with a disability from the school district, an administrator from the district, teachers (general and special education), an evaluator, a representative from the county, and someone from Early Intervention if your child received those services.

That is quite a crowd! To include you as a member of the team, your district should:

- give you at least 5 working days notice of where and when the meeting will be held;
 - reschedule the meeting if it is inconvenient for you to attend;
- get copies of report summaries ahead of time for your review;
- let you know who will be attending the meeting;
- come to the meeting prepared to develop the IEP (the district should NOT present you with a completed IEP that has been written prior to the meeting);
- give you a copy of the IEP and allow you time to look it over or take it home and share it with others before you agree to the plan.



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



- get to know your child's teacher (A good, trusting relationship between you and the teacher can catch things before they turn into problems.)

- have regular conferences or other agreed upon ways to communicate (The method of letting you know your child's progress is now required to be part of the IEP.)
- listen to your child (This includes his/her non-verbal behavior as well. How is he/she reacting at home?)



You are a decision-maker now, as you should be. It may take some practice, but you can do it!! Your right to be heard, to participate, to disagree, or to ask for changes is protected by law. Remember, laws don't enforce themselves. Even if you feel nervous...speak up, ask questions, share your opinions about your child. This isn't being nasty or pushy or difficult. It is being a contributing member of a team that is working for your child!

Service Options for Preschoolers with a Disability

Related Services

Special Class in an Integrated Setting

Special Education Itinerant Services

Special Class



Service Locations



Home



Worksite of Provider



ABC DayCare
Nursery Schools
Head Start



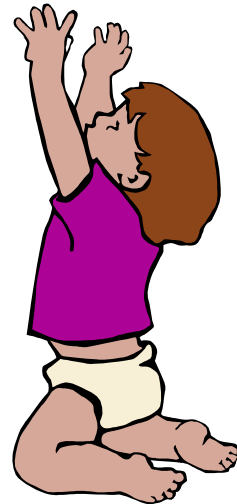
Center-Based Program
Pre-Kindergarten

See page 15 & 16 for more explanation.

The Service Options for Preschoolers with a Disability

Where can preschool children receive their services?

- Home
- Nursery School
- Day Care Centers
- Pre-Kindergarten
- Head Starts
- Special Education Preschools



1. Related Services:*

This option provides a child with the services of one or more therapists to meet his/her special needs. The therapist works with the child a specified number of times each week, and also interacts with the family and the staff of any typical program the child might attend. **The therapy(ies) can be provided at any of the sites above. The site will be decided at the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) meeting.**



2. Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT):

This option provides a child with the services of a special education teacher. Sometimes other children with special needs receive services at the same time. The SEIT works directly with the child or with the child's family and/or regular teacher to help adapt any typical program to the child's needs. The SEIT will work with the child and family or program at least 2 hours each week. Some children in this model also receive the related service therapies. They will work with the child the amount of time prescribed on his/ her IEP. **All services can be provided in a variety of locations.**



*(For example, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy)

At your CPSE meeting, Options 1 & 2 **must** be considered for your child prior to the consideration of either of the following, more restrictive program options.



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

In this model, a child with special needs is **placed in a class that contains both typical children and other children with special needs.** There is a special education teacher and assistants involved with the children throughout their educational program, as well as a regular preschool or day care teacher. Usually there are between 15-20 children in the class. The related service staff are involved as required by the IEPs. Children must attend this program a minimum of 2 days per week, 2 1/2 hours each day. Most children attend these programs for 1/2 day sessions, as do their typical peers.



4. **Special Class:**

This is a class of no more than 12 children, all of whom have special needs. It is staffed by a special education teacher, and one or more assistants. Related services staff meet with each child as prescribed in his/her IEP. As with the Special Class in an Integrated Setting a child must attend the program at least two days each week for 2 1/2 hours each day. Again, most of the children attend classes for 1/2 day sessions

In all cases, the CPSE will provide the appropriate amount of services to meet your child's special educational needs while still ensuring that he/she is being served in the most natural setting possible. In other words, as much as possible, kids should be "just kids."



Due Process Rights

SUMMARY OF PARENT RIGHTS

Parents are guaranteed the right to:

- Be Fully Informed
- Give/Withhold Consent for Initial Evaluation & Placement
- Receive Advance Notice of All Meetings/Changes in Program
- Request Change in Meeting Date/Time/Place
- Participate in Decision-Making
- Have Information Explained
- Request an Independent Evaluation if They Disagree
- Have Confidentiality Maintained
- Receive Copies of All Reports at a Reasonable Cost
- Examine School Records
- Challenge & Appeal CPSE Decisions



If you would like detailed information about your legal rights, please contact:

The Early Childhood Direction Center
Syracuse University
805 South Crouse Avenue
Syracuse, NY 13244-2280
315-443-4444 - 1-800-962-5488

Transitioning from Preschool to School

TRANSITIONING FROM PRESCHOOL TO SCHOOL FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN TURNING FIVE YEARS OLD



What Happens?

1. Start talking to your school district's personnel about what services might be available for your child during the next school year. Ask them what you can do to help prepare.
2. The preschool program your child attends or the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) refers your child to the school district's Committee on Special Education (CSE) if services may need to continue.
3. A meeting for parents of preschoolers should be held by your district or the program serving your child to explain the transition process and answer any questions you may have.
4. School personnel observe your child, conduct any necessary evaluations and discuss recommendations with teachers and therapists. Be sure your child's immunizations are up to date for school registration.

When?

Fall – Early Winter

Early Winter

Winter – Early Spring

Winter – Spring

What Happens?

5. Further discussions may take place between you, the CSE chairperson, school principal and others about future program options for your child.

6. Formal reviews are conducted by your school district with you. The CPSE annual review may result in your child exiting from special education services or, if your child has a continued need for special education, a CSE meeting will be held. This may be done jointly with the CPSE meeting. Recommendations are made for any services your child will need and a school age Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be developed.

7. Visit the school. Whenever possible and appropriate, participate in the regular kindergarten orientation activities offered by the district. Get to know the teachers and staff who may be working with your child. Ask them any questions you have. Meet the parents of the other children.

When?

Spring

Spring

Spring – Early Summer



WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES?

The “OFFICIAL” New York State Definition



A preschool child who because of mental, physical or emotional reasons has been identified as having a disability can receive appropriate educational opportunities from special programs and services approved by the Department of Education.

The CPSE must consider all the evaluation components and when reviewed in combination and compared to accepted milestones indicate:

- a 12 month delay in one or more functional area(s) **OR**
- a 33% delay in functional area or a 25% delay in each of two functional areas **OR**
- a score of 2.0 standard deviations below the mean in one functional area, or a score of 1.5 standard deviations below the mean in each of two functional areas **OR**
- meet the criteria of
 - autism
 - deafness
 - deaf-blindness
 - hard of hearing
 - orthopedically impaired
 - other health impaired
 - traumatic brain injury
 - visually impaired

Information on the “official” New York State definition and the criteria detailed here can be obtained from the Early Childhood Direction Center.