

*Parents are usually the first to notice when their child isn't developing as quickly as other children.*

## Early Childhood Special Education

Children ages three through five years old who qualify for Early Childhood Special Education receive special education and related services provided by their school district to meet their individual needs.

### **What is Early Childhood Special Education?**

Early Childhood Special Education is special education and related services for children three through five years old that are provided by your local school district at no cost to families.

Special education is specialized instruction that meets your child's individual and unique needs.

Related services are services a child may need in order to benefit from special education, such as speech and language, occupational or physical therapy, transportation, or counseling.

School districts often work with local childcare providers so your child can receive services in a location where they are most comfortable.

### **How do I know if my child may qualify for Early Childhood Special Education?**

Your child may qualify if they have been receiving consistent specialized instruction, developmental therapy services or speech and language services through an Individualized Family Service Plan/One Plan and demonstrates a developmental delay in one or more of the following areas: communication, self-help, social/emotional, motor, or cognitive skills; or

Your child has a medical condition which may result in significant delays by their sixth birthday and the school Evaluation and Planning Team (EPT) has determined that your child needs Early Childhood Special Education services.



### **What can we do if we think our child might have a medical condition or a developmental delay?**

Talk to your child's pediatrician. The pediatrician may refer your child to the Child Development Clinic (CDC) for a more complete evaluation. The CDC is part of the Vermont Department of Health's Division for Children with Special Health Needs and offers evaluation and follow-up services for infants and children. You may also contact the CDC directly.

### **What happens at the screening?**

At a screening, a child's development is checked to determine whether they have delays in areas such as communication, vision, hearing, movement, social or self-help skills, or learning. If screening results show that your child may have a significant developmental delay, the school will want to do further testing, which is known as a comprehensive special education evaluation.

### **What is a comprehensive special education evaluation?**

A comprehensive evaluation is the process of gathering information to find out a child's current strengths, abilities and needs. This evaluation will determine whether your child is eligible to receive services through Early Childhood Special Education. As part of the evaluation process, the school and your family will discuss how the Early Childhood Special Education staff will address questions and concerns about your child's development. They will also discuss what measures they will take to determine if your child has a developmental delay or medical condition.

### **Who conducts my child's evaluation and when must it be done?**

The EPT will arrange for your child's evaluation and prepare a written plan describing areas to be observed, and questions to be answered. As a member of this team, you must be given a chance to provide information about your child before an evaluation plan is written.

If new tests and measures are needed to evaluate your child, the school must get your written permission before it conducts the evaluation.

The school then has 60 days from the date you give your written consent to complete your child's evaluation and issue a report. If the school must delay the evaluation for any reason, they must notify you in writing before the 60 days end.

### **What if my child was evaluated by my pediatrician or the Child Development Clinic?**

If your toddler or preschooler has been evaluated by a pediatrician or by the Child Development Clinic, the school may use this information as part of the evaluation, with your permission.

### **Who makes the decision about my child's eligibility for Early Childhood Special Education services?**

When the evaluation is completed, the EPT will write a report summarizing the results. You will be invited to attend an eligibility meeting to discuss the results. The EPT's report will indicate whether your child is eligible to receive Early Childhood Special Education services. The school will notify you in writing about the eligibility decision and give you a copy of the evaluation report. If you have questions, ask the school to explain the contents of the report to you. If you disagree with the school's evaluation or the eligibility decision, you have the right to request an independent or outside evaluation of your child. You may also request mediation or a due process hearing from the Vermont Agency of Education.

### **What if my child has a disability but is not found to be eligible for Special Education?**

Talk to your school about whether your child qualifies for a Section 504 plan. This plan helps provide children with disabilities equal access to their learning environment through the use of appropriate accommodations and/or services.

### **What happens after my child becomes eligible for Early Childhood Special Education services?**

If your child is determined eligible for services, the school will invite you to attend your child's first Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting. An IEP is a written plan that describes your child's educational goals and what the school will do to support these goals over a one year period. The IEP also states the kinds of special education and related services your child will receive.

The IEP team, which includes you, will develop your child's first plan within 30 days after they are found eligible for services. You must give your written consent before your child first receives special education and related services through an Early Childhood Special Education program. You have the right to consent to some or all of the services in your child's first IEP.

### **How often will my child be evaluated?**

The school will reevaluate your child at least every 3 years. Reevaluations may take place more often if you or the school believes it is needed.

As members of the IEP team, parents play a vital part in helping their child get needed services. You are the best source of information about your child. The information you share with those who help your child is an important part of an effective education plan that meets your child's unique needs. Families of children with special needs often work with many different professionals. At first you may feel that you don't have the information you need to make good decisions. You may also find it confusing to figure out what each professional will be doing to help your child. Setting up regular times to talk to your child's teachers and service providers can help you better understand IEP services.

### **How often do we meet with our child's teachers and other professionals?**

You may find it helpful to check your child's progress often. The IEP contains up to four goal review dates in a year. Once a year, your child's IEP team will meet to develop a new IEP

for the coming year; however, the IEP team can meet as often as needed throughout the year.

### **What can we do to change or improve our child's Early Childhood Special Education program?**

You have the right to disagree with the services your child is receiving. To make changes in your child's program, you can:

- Ask for an IEP meeting to discuss your concerns and the changes you want to make in your child's education program.
- Request a reevaluation of your child to look at the areas where you feel improvement is needed.
- Ask for an outside or independent evaluation of your child, at the school's expense, if you disagree with the school's evaluation.
- Request mediation or a due process hearing from the Vermont Agency of Education.
- You can also ask another parent, relative, or a friend to help you work out your differences with the school.

### **What should be in my child's IEP?**

- Your child's strengths, challenges and needs. Duration and frequency of services, and service provider information.
- Goals and objectives for your child which are aligned with the Vermont Early Learning Standards and measured against three child outcomes:
  1. Developing positive social emotional skills: how children interact with their family, other adults and children
  2. Acquiring and using knowledge and skills: how children learn and use language and communication skills
  3. Taking appropriate actions to meet needs: how children become more independent by learning self-help skills
- Where services will be provided: Placement considerations should include public pre-kindergarten classrooms, private childcare, Head Start, and your home.

**What can we do to prepare for our child's move from Early Childhood Special Education to elementary school?**

Your child's move into kindergarten will be more successful if you and the school team plan carefully and early. In order to ensure a smooth transition, your child's IEP team should meet three to six months before your child enters kindergarten. A kindergarten teacher and special education teacher or service provider from your elementary school will be invited to attend this meeting.

Work with your child's teachers to gather information about the elementary school's procedures, teachers, resources and programs so you are more familiar with them.

When possible, visit the elementary school ahead of time and meet with your child's new teachers, principal and other parents.

Contact your school district's Early Childhood Special Education coordinator or special education administrator if you have questions or concerns.

Contact your superintendent's office to find out the name and telephone number of these individuals if needed.

**Resources**

[Child Development Clinic \(CDC\), Vermont Department of Health](#)

Provides specialized medical care for children with special healthcare needs. 800-660-4427 or 802-863-7338

[Child Development Division, Department for Children & Families](#)

Seeks to increase access to high quality services for children and families. 800-649-2642 or 802-241-3110

[Children's Integrated Services, Early Intervention](#)

CIS-EI provides family-centered early intervention for children from birth to age 3 who have, or may be at risk for, a delay in their development. 802-279-6206 or 802-279-1302

[Nine East Network](#)

Statewide program for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. They provide support and services for children with speech and language challenges. 802-229-0100

[University of Vermont, Center on Disability & Community Inclusion I-Team \(CDCI\)](#)

Assists school teams in the delivery of educational services to students with intensive education needs. 80-656-1132

[Vermont Agency of Education](#)

Early Childhood Special Education Assistance for families and schools regarding Early Childhood Special Education and parental rights. 802-479-1030 or 802-479-1454



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