FAMILY GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES FOR SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

A SHARED PATH TO SUCCESS (SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM)
A Shared Path to Success, was launched citywide in September 2012 as part of the Special Education Reform. Some main goals of A Shared Path are the following:

- Core belief—that special education is a service, and not a place
- Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) learn in the least restrictive environment alongside their general education peers, to the greatest extent possible and with appropriate supports.
- Most important to this process has been our work with parents and families. This Family Guide is part of NYC’s efforts to make sure you have access to the information you need to be a partner in your child’s education. The guide describes the continuum of services and supports available to school-age students with IEPs
- Our goal is to ensure that all students, including students with disabilities, have access to a rigorous education that leaves them well-prepared for college and careers.
What should you do if you think your child may need special education services?

- **Asking the Right Questions at the Beginning**
  - If you believe that your child may require special education services, it is important that you ask the right questions from the start. Talk to your child’s current teacher to find out if there are supports available within the general education setting at the school that he or she already attends. Those kinds of supports might be all your child needs.
  - Schools offer supports including instructional intervention, reading remediation programs, and counseling. It may also be possible to adapt your child’s general education program without special education services.

- **Response to Intervention**
  - **Response to Intervention (RtI)** is an instructional approach and preventative tool used by schools to ensure that all students have equal access to high-quality, rigorous instruction that is matched to their needs. RtI works to improve student performance by identifying struggling students early on and providing necessary supports or interventions. RtI can be especially powerful in that many students will benefit from the supports provided by RtI alone and may not require additional services.
If Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies have been implemented and you have talked with your child’s teacher and school, you may still feel that your child needs additional support.

In that case, you may refer your child for a **Special Education Evaluation**, which is a series of evaluations to determine if your child has a disability. You can make a referral for a special education evaluation at any time.
Timeline

- The Steps of the Special Education Process*

1. Initial Referral or Request for Referral
2. Evaluation
3. CSE Meeting
4. Arranging Special Education Services
5. Annual Review/Reevaluation
Step 1: Initial Referral/Request for Referral

- Ways you may request an Initial Evaluation for your child:
  - Send a letter to the principal at your child’s school
  - Give a written statement to a professional staff member of your child’s school (teacher, parent coordinator, social worker, etc.)
  - Ask a school professional to assist you in making a referral.

- The letter should state demographic information as well as why you feel an initial evaluation is needed for special education services: What area(s) is your child struggling in? How long has this been going on for? What strategies have you tried at home to help him or her?
Step 1 Continuation...

After the request for initial referral has been made, within 10 school days, the school will initiate the referral process by sending you a **Notice of Referral Letter**

- Explains your rights as a parent
- Provides the name and telephone number of a person to call if you have any questions; and asks for you to meet with the school social worker at a social history interview. Here, you will be asked to sign a **Consent for Initial Evaluation form**. Even if you made the written referral yourself, you must still consent to the evaluations in order for the process to begin.

- If you choose *not* to sign consent, and if it is an *initial referral*, your child will *not* be evaluated.*
Step 2: The Evaluation

- The evaluations will determine your child’s skills, abilities and areas of need that affect his or her school performance.
- A comprehensive psycho-educational evaluation that looks at what your child knows and how he or she learns;
- A social history of your child’s developmental and family history, often from birth to present
- An observation of your child in his or her current educational setting
- Assessments that include a review of school records, teacher assessments, and parent and student interviews
- Other tests that may be appropriate for your child, such as speech, language, functional behavior assessments or assistive technology, if requested (Some assessments may need to be referred out of the building if not available in house)
- You will also be asked to provide the school based or district CSE with a recent physical examination of your child.
Independent Evaluations

- An independent evaluation means a test or assessment done by a qualified examiner who does not work for the Department or your child’s school.

- Although the Department will conduct any necessary tests and assessments, you also have the right to provide the school or district CSE with private evaluations conducted at your own expense.

- FYI…(Some insurances will cover these Evaluations)
Once your child’s evaluation is completed, you will be invited to attend a **CSE meeting**.

- School Psychologist
- Teachers/Administration
- Related Service Providers
- Social Worker

You should receive a written letter at least five days before the meeting.

*If you cannot attend the meeting, you must contact the school and ask to change the date. It is very important that you attend CSE meetings so that you will be able to participate in a final decision that will be made about your child’s special education services and programs.*
Before the CSE Initial Evaluation meeting...

You may request that all evaluations, records and reports that were used to assess your child be provided to you before the CSE meeting. In some instances, it may be preferable for you to pick up the reports prior to the day of the CSE meeting rather than to have them mailed so that any immediate concerns may be addressed. If you choose to pick up the evaluations, the social worker will provide you with contact information to arrange a time to pick up the evaluations and discuss and/or review the evaluations.
During the Meeting: Some Questions to Ask at a CSE Meeting

- How has the teacher accommodated my child’s learning and behavioral needs in the classroom?
- Are there things I can do at home to support the IEP goals?
- What type of learner is my child? Does the teacher attempt to use my child’s strengths while teaching him or her?
- How frequently is my child’s progress monitored? What are the best ways for me to stay in touch with my child’s teachers to be informed of academic or behavioral progress?
- Is my child making progress towards his or her IEP goals?
- How are the Common Core Learning Standards being integrated into my child’s instruction?
- If a service is not working, how can I work with my child’s school based or district CSE to explore better services for him or her?
- What sorts of programs or other supports might help my child? How can we get those?
- What are the promotion criteria for my child? How will he or she be evaluated according to grade level?
Determining Eligibility
The school based CSE will decide whether your child is eligible for special education services. A school-age student is eligible for special education services if the student:

- Meets the criteria for one or more of the disability classifications and the student requires approved special education services and programs.
Your Child will be Educated with the Combination of Services that Best Suits His or Her Needs

Once a student is classified as needing services, the CSE team decides which of the following placement would best fit your child…
General Education with Related Services

- Related services are provided to advance the achievement of a student with a disability in connection with his or her educational program.

- Counseling
- Hearing Education Services
- Speech/Language Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Vision Education Services
- Paraprofessional Services

If your child has been recommended to receive one or more related services in his or her IEP and the Department is unable to provide such service(s) with its own staff or with staff from agencies under contract, either during or after the school day, a Related Service Authorization (RSA) will be issued to the parent. An RSA allows the parent to use the services of an appropriately licensed, independent provider of the recommended related service(s) at no cost to you.
Counseling

- The purpose of counseling is to help students recognize and modify behaviors that interfere with learning. Counseling is recommended for students who have significant social emotional difficulties that significantly interfere with learning.

- These problems can include difficulty interacting appropriately with adults or peers, withdrawal or acting out, low self-esteem, and poor coping skills.
Hearing Education Services

- Hearing education services provide support to students who are deaf or hearing-impaired, and include guidance, social work, counseling, transition services and work-study programs. Hearing education may be recommended for a student when support is necessary to allow the student to access fully his/her educational environment.
Occupational Therapy

- Occupational therapy (OT) helps a student strengthen school-based adaptive and functional skills, such as:
  - Fine motor skills
  - The ability to carry out classroom responsibilities
  - Make smooth transitions;
  - Functional sensory motor skills
  - Activities of daily living, including wheelchair management

- Occupational therapy is recommended when the environment needs to be adapted, tasks modified, skills taught or a student/family educated in order to increase the student’s participation in, and performance of, everyday life and school activities.
Speech & Language

- Speech/ language therapy helps to improve a student’s listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Therapists focus on communication skills such as
  - Comprehension (following directions, understanding texts),
  - Language (word meaning, putting words together, using correct grammar)
  - Articulation (speech sounds), voice (use of voice to produce sound)
  - Pragmatics (social language)
  - Fluency (rhythm of speech)

- Speech/language therapy is recommended for a student when such support is necessary to improve the student’s listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in academic and social situations.
Physical therapy helps a student to improve his/her physical ability to function and make smooth transitions at school. Therapy may include attention to gross motor development, mobility, balance, and coordination in various school settings such as the classroom, gym, bathrooms, playgrounds, and staircases.

Physical therapy is recommended when such support is necessary to allow a student to access his/her educational environment, including the ability to access areas of the school via walking, wheelchair or other means of mobility; student participation in classroom activities — e.g., participating physically and maneuvering within the classroom environment; and accessing (and participating in) the lunchroom, playground, bathroom, transportation, etc.
Vision Education Services

- Vision education services support instruction for students who are visually impaired by allowing them to develop academic, social, vocational and life skills, literacy, and acquisition of information using tactile, visual and auditory strategies.

- Vision education may be recommended for a child whose vision is so impaired that functioning within the classroom cannot take place without the use of assistive materials and adaptive approaches.

- Orientation and mobility services are designed to improve your child’s understanding of spatial and environmental concepts and use of information he or she receives through the senses (e.g., sound, temperature, vibrations) for establishing, maintaining and regaining orientation and line of travel.
Individual paraprofessionals support students for all or a portion of the school day to address their individual needs and to allow them to benefit from instruction and related services. An individual paraprofessional is recommended when necessary to allow a student to participate safely and fully in classroom and other school activities and to derive educational benefit from instruction and related services.

- 1 to 1 Para
- Classroom Para
General Education with Special Education Teacher Support Services: **SETSS**

- Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) are specially designed and/or supplemental instruction provided by a special education teacher. These services help your child stay in the general education classroom while receiving services from a special education teacher.

- SETSS may be provided in the general education classroom, or in a separate location outside of the general education classroom or in any combination.

- When SETSS are provided in a group, the group may not include more than eight students.

- SETSS may be provided for as few as three hours a week and as much as 50% of each day.

- Your child’s IEP must state the number of periods a week that the services will be provided, whether those services will be provided directly with your child or indirectly with his or her general education teacher and where the services will be provided.
Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT)

- Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classrooms include students with disabilities and students who are non-disabled who are educated together with two teachers, a general education teacher and a special education teacher. The teachers work together and collaborate throughout the day to adapt and modify instruction for your child and make sure the entire class has access to the general education curriculum.

- The number of students with disabilities may not exceed 40% of the total class register or a maximum of twelve students with disabilities in an ICT class.
Special Class Services are services provided for children with disabilities in a self-contained classroom for any part of the school day.

They serve children whose needs cannot be met within the general education classroom, even Special Education Teacher Support Services, Related Services or participation in an ICT class.

In self-contained special classes, students must be grouped by similarity of educational needs. Classes may contain students with the same disability or with different disabilities as long as they have similar levels of academic and learning characteristics, levels of social development, levels of physical development and management needs.

- 12:1 Elementary/Middle School
- 15:1 High School
Specialized Public Schools for Students with Significant Disabilities (District 75 Schools)

- District 75 provides instructional support in a wide variety of settings for students with significant disabilities. Keeping within the mandate for Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), students can receive District 75 services in general education classrooms, in special classes located in community school buildings and in special classes in specialized schools.

- Students who have the following may benefit from a D75 school:
  - Significant hearing and vision impairments
  - Severe anxiety in school settings (School phobic)
  - Medical or psychiatric issues that require temporary or long-term instructions in a hospital/home setting
  - Bilingual instruction and support, ESL services, travel training, personal activities of daily living (ADL) skill training, vocational programming and transition
Closing the CSE Meeting

- **Initial Consent**
  - If your child has never received special education services, you must give consent for the recommended special education services before they will be provided. You will be asked to indicate your consent at the bottom of the Prior Written Notice. If you do not consent, your child will remain in general education without the recommended services.

- **Withdrawing Consent for Special Education Services**
  - At anytime after consenting to special education services, you may withdraw your consent for the special education services specified in your child’s IEP. The request must be in writing. When consent is withdrawn, it is for all special education and related services specified in your child’s IEP.
Every year, your child’s IEP will be reviewed by his or her special education team which usually involves the following members:

- Special Education teacher
- A general education teacher
- Related Service Providers
- Administrators

Present Levels of Performance
Strengths/Weaknesses
Annual goals
Testing Accommodations
Modifications
Classroom strategies
Promotional Criteria/Modified or Standard
Triennial/Re-evaluation

- Reevaluation: An updated evaluation(s) for a student with a disability.

- Students with disabilities must be reevaluated once every three years, except when the district and parent agree in writing that a reevaluation is not necessary. A reevaluation may not be conducted more than once a year unless the school and the parent agree otherwise.
The IEP Explained...

- There are many sections of a student’s IEP.
- Each section must be completely filled out by your child’s special education providers.

- The following slides will explain briefly what each section of the IEP means.
Present Levels of Performance

- Evaluation results
- Classroom tests and assignments
- Individual tests given to decide eligibility for services during reevaluation
- Observations made by parents, teachers, related service providers and other school staff
- Current performance includes how the child’s disability affects his or her involvement and progress in general education curriculum
Measurable Annual Goals

- These are goals that your child can reasonably accomplish in a school year. Goals may be academic, address social or behavioral needs, relate to physical needs or address other educational needs.
- You will be updated on each goal by your student’s special education provider the same time report cards are given.
Recommended Special Education Programs and Services

- Lists your child’s special education and/or Related Services that will be provided:
  
  - Program (Related Services only, ICT, SETSS, Special Class)
  - Related Services in conjunction with programing
Participation with students without disabilities / Assessments

**Participation with Students without Disabilities**

- The IEP must explain the extent to which your child will participate with non-disabled children in the general education class and other school activities.

**Participation in State and District-wide Assessments**

- The IEP must indicate whether your child will participate in state and district-wide assessments and what accommodations, if any, your child will need during the administration of these tests.
Beginning in Grade 3 through 8, if your child is participating in state and citywide tests, the IEP must specify whether your child will be held to the same promotion standard as all students or whether your child will have modified promotion criteria. If modified promotion criteria are recommended, the IEP must describe the criteria.
Transition Services

- Transition services are a coordinated set of activities which facilitates the student’s movement from school to post-school activities with the goal of continued education, employment, and independent living. Transition Planning for students begins at age 12.

- Vocational Assessments for student, parent, and teacher are needed.
What is a 504 Plan?

- Section 504 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is designed to help parents of students with physical or mental impairments in public schools, or publicly funded private schools, work with educators to design customized educational plans. These 504 plans legally ensure that students will be treated fairly at school.
504 Plan Basics

- Students can qualify for 504 plans if they have physical or mental impairments that affect or limit any of their abilities to:
  - walk, breathe, eat, or sleep
  - communicate, see, hear, or speak
  - read, concentrate, think, or learn
  - stand, bend, lift, or work

- Can be temporary or Permanent disabilities*
504 Accommodations

- preferential seating
- extended time on tests and assignments
- reduced homework or classwork
- verbal, visual, or technology aids
- modified textbooks or audio-video materials
- behavior management support
- adjusted class schedules or grading
- verbal testing
- excused lateness, absence, or missed classwork
- pre-approved nurse's office visits and accompaniment to visits
- occupational or physical therapy
504 Plans vs. IEPs

- 504 plan modifies a student's regular education program in a regular classroom setting and the 504 plan is monitored by classroom teachers.
- A student with an IEP, as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), usually receives different educational services in a special educational setting and the IEP programs are delivered and monitored by additional school support staff.
- Also, parental approval and involvement is required for an IEP, but is not for a 504 plan. Full parental participation in the 504 plan process, however, is important for the student's academic success.
After reviewing academic and medical records and interviewing the student and parents, the 504 team determines if the child is eligible to have a 504 plan put in place.

Sometimes school officials and parents disagree about eligibility. Disagreements also can arise about details within the 504 plan itself. In these cases, parents can make written appeals to the school district or the U.S. Office for Civil Rights.
Reviewing the 504 Plan

- Once the plan is developed by the team, all the student's teachers are responsible for implementing the accommodations in the plan, as well as participating in plan reviews.

- The 504 plan should be reviewed at least annually to determine if the accommodations are up to date and appropriate, based on the student's needs. Any 504 plan team member, including the parent, may call for a 504 plan review at any time if there is an educational concern or change in the student's needs.

- The plan can be terminated if the 504 team determines that the student:
  - is no longer disabled
  - no longer requires any special accommodations or services to meet the identified needs
  - can be appropriately instructed in general education classroom