



IMPORTANT TERMS

From A-Z

Consent

Permission to do certain things. A parent must give written permission before the Local Education Agency (LEA) can take some actions. The LEA must explain what it plans to do first. This must be done in the parent's native language. Parents may give or take away consent at any time. The LEA needs consent before an evaluation. They also need it before providing services in school.

Developmental Screening

A list of questions about what your child can do. This helps Early Stages decide if a child needs an evaluation. A screening cannot qualify a child for services without an evaluation.

Disability

A physical or mental condition that limits one or more life activities. There are 14 disability categories in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Categories include developmental delay (DD), Autism (AUT), and speech or language impairment (SLI).



Early Stages

An evaluation center for children aged 2 years 8 months to 5 years 10 months. We identify developmental delays and disabilities in children. We provide evaluations for DC children who are not in school or who are homeschooled. We evaluate children living outside of DC if they attend a private school or childcare center in DC. Early Stages is a program of DC Public Schools (DCPS). All our services are free.

Eligibility

Whether a child qualifies for special education services. A child is eligible if they have an IDEA-defined disability that impacts their education.

Evaluation

A comprehensive look at a child's development. Special education teachers and service providers complete evaluations. Evaluations may include interviews and observations. They may also include assessments of skills like learning, speech, and movement.

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Education that is free to parents and beneficial for a child. DCPS must provide FAPE for all DC children. This includes children with disabilities.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

A written plan that describes the services and supports a child needs in school. IEPs are only for children found eligible through an evaluation.

Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team)

A team that makes special education decisions for a child. It includes school staff and the parent. The team meets to determine if a child qualifies for services. The team also creates and updates the IEP.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The federal law that explains how to serve children with disabilities.

Local Education Agency (LEA)

An entity with administrative control of public schools. An LEA is a public board of education or other public authority. In DC, DCPS and public charter schools are LEAs.

Location of Services (LOS)

The specific school building where a child receives services. The LEA determines location.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

The concept that children with disabilities must be taught in the same class as children without disabilities when possible. Children who need more support may be offered a seat in a separate class or program.

Notice of Procedural Safeguards

The document that explains parent and child rights in the special education process.

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)

The agency that develops education policy for all DC schools.

Parent

A child's caregiver who has certain rights under the law. The IDEA definition of a parent includes biological and adoptive parents along with legal guardians. Sometimes, a relative may be considered a parent under IDEA.

Placement

The setting where a child receives IEP services. The IEP team decides placement. Placement is often in a class with other children who do not have IEPs. It can also be in a specialized program.

Prior Written Notice (PWN)

A document that informs you what the LEA plans to do during the special education process. For example, a PWN could tell you the LEA would like to evaluate your child.

Referral

When someone asks the LEA to begin a child's evaluation. Anyone can make a referral. Early Stages accepts web, phone, email, fax, and in-person referrals.

Services Plan

A written plan for children in private or religious schools. It provides limited services for eligible children. A services plan does not provide FAPE.

Strong Start

DC's Early Intervention program. Strong Starts accepts referrals for any child under 2 years 10 months of age. Strong Start provides services for children with delays or disabilities.

504 Plan

A plan for children who have a condition that limits one or more major life activities, such as walking, standing, and learning. A child who is not eligible for an IEP may be eligible for a 504 plan. A child must already be enrolled in school to receive 504 services.

Special Education Services

Special Education Services

Supports and services to help a child with a disability access their education. Services can include specialized instruction and other related services. These services are free.

Specialized Instruction

Changes to the curriculum to meet a child's needs. The term "specially designed instruction" means the same thing.

Related Services

Services that help a child benefit from instruction. This page contains more information about some of these services.

Assistive Technology

Tools used to support a child with a disability. Services can be low-tech, such as communication boards and pencil grips. They can also be high-tech, such as electronic readers and speech-to-text programs.

Mental Health and Behavioral Support Services

Support with activities during the school day, including behavior plans and social, emotional, or behavior assessments.

Audiology Support

Support with hearing, listening, and auditory processing. Services can include tools that allow a child to hear in class.

Occupational Therapy

Support with sensory processing and independence. Services can include help with fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination.

Physical Therapy

Support with activity and physical function. Services can include help with walking, using stairs, and using a wheelchair.

Speech-Language Therapy

Support with communication and language. Services can include help using and understanding words and phrases. They can also include help making sounds clearly.

Vision Support

Support with vision issues that affect a child's education. Services can include large print materials, seating close to the white board or screen, braille, and audiobooks.