

Parents are usually the first to notice when their child is not 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 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 make a referral for further screening or evaluation. The pediatrician may refer your child to Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN). CSHN supports children with complex, chronic health conditions and/or developmental disorders, ages birth to-21, and their families. You may also contact CSHN 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 other professionals?

If your toddler or preschooler has been evaluated by a pediatrician or by other professionals, 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 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 disabilities often work with many different professionals. At first you may feel that you do not 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 should be included.
- 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 or private pre-kindergarten classrooms, private childcare, Head Start, and your home.



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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 or program 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

[Children with Special Health Needs](#) (CSHN) supports Vermont children and youth with special health needs by supporting comprehensive, culturally sensitive, community-based and family-centered services. This is a free public health program for families. 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 with Special Health Needs, Department of Health](#)
800-660-4427 or 802-863-7338

[The Cares Team](#)
Working collaboratively with school teams to build capacity, and support access for students ages 3-22 with hearing loss.
cares.team@uvm.edu

[University of Vermont, Center on Disability & Community Inclusion \(CDCI\) Interdisciplinary Team \(I-Team\)](#)
Assists school teams in the delivery of educational services to students with intensive education needs. 800-770-6103

[Vermont Agency of Education](#)
Special Education Technical Assistance. 802-828-1256

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