

Getting Started with the Special Education Process

Parent Tips

Document everything: Keep copies of emails, letters, and evaluations.

Bring support: You can bring a trusted friend, advocate, or provider to meetings.

Ask questions: It's okay to stop the meeting and say, "Can you explain that differently?"

Stay involved: Your participation matters.

Who Can Help?

Your child's teacher, school counselor, or principal

The Special Education Director
at your school district

PEATC (Parent Educational
Advocacy Training Center)
Phone: 800-869-6782
Website: www.peatc.org

Important Virginia Timelines

Action	Timeline
School response to evaluation request	Within 10 business days
Evaluation completion	Within 65 business days (after consent)
IEP development (if eligible)	Within 30 calendar days

A Quick Guide for Parents

What is Special Education?

Special education provides individualized instruction and supports to students with disabilities so they can succeed in school. Services are protected by federal law (IDEA) and Virginia state regulations.

Know the Signs

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Does your child struggle with:

- Learning basic skills (reading, writing, math)?
- Speech and communication?
- Behavior or emotional regulation?
- Paying attention, staying organized?
- Physical access or health concerns impacting school?

If yes, your child may benefit from an evaluation for special education services.

Request an Evaluation

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You (the parent/guardian) have the right to request an evaluation at any time.

How to Request:

- Write a short letter or email to your child's teacher, principal, or special education department.
- Include your concerns and request a comprehensive evaluation for special education eligibility.

Timeline:

- The school-based team must meet within 10 business days of the referral, and if they determine the child may have a disability, they must refer the child to the special education administrator within 3 business days.
- Some school divisions require vision and hearing screenings within 60 days of the start of the school year (grades 3, 7, 10).



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Evaluation Process

If the school agrees to evaluate, they will ask for your **written consent**.

Then:

- Once the referral reaches the special education administrator (with parental consent), **evaluation and eligibility determination must occur within 65 business days**.
- It may include academic testing, psychological assessments, speech/language, OT/PT, or behavioral observations.



The Eligibility Meeting

Once evaluations are complete, the school will schedule an eligibility meeting with you and the team.

At this meeting, the team will determine:

- If your child qualifies under one of 13 disability categories
- If your child needs special education services

Even if your child has a diagnosis, they must also show an educational impact to qualify.



If Your Child is Found Eligible

Congrats—you're on the path to support!

- If found eligible, **the IEP must be developed within 30 calendar days** of that eligibility determination.
- The school must provide you a **copy of the evaluation report at least 2 business days before** the eligibility meeting, or at the latest, **within 10 calendar days after** the meeting.
- After the IEP meeting, you must get a **copy of the IEP at no cost, no later than 10 calendar days** afterward.
- You are a **full and equal member** of the IEP team.

If Your Child is Found Not Eligible

Don't panic—you still have options:

Ask about a **504 Plan** (for accommodations like extended time, breaks, etc.)

You can disagree with the decision and request:
An Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)
A mediation or due process hearing

Final Thoughts

The special education process can feel like a lot—but you don't have to do it alone.

You are your child's best advocate.

Stay informed, ask questions, and don't be afraid to speak up.

You've got this.

