

Parents as Partners in Special Education



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Today we will:

- ❑ Understand what it means to be an effective advocate
- ❑ Build confidence when working with professionals
- ❑ Start to understand the special education systems, starting with your concerns



*How to Be An Effective
Advocate*

You Are an Equal Partner

- You are an equal partner with professionals.
- Be prepared for all meetings
- Know the purpose of the meeting
- Prepare ahead of time
- Arrive on time
- Bring necessary materials

Be Knowledgeable

Understand your family member's special needs/disability.

- Use your community resource specialists (FRN, VMRC, school district)
- Learn about available community resources
- READ, READ, READ!
- Always do your research

Be Reasonable & Realistic

- Stay calm, cool, and focused
- Losing your temper makes you part of the problem
- Be part of the solution
- Accepting help is okay
- Everyone needs support sometimes

Explore Supports & Accommodations

- Identify needed adaptations
- Consider accommodations
- Explore assistive technology
- Focus on what will help your family member succeed

Identify and Share Needs

- Write down ALL needs
- Share needs with appropriate agencies and professionals
- State needs in positive terms

Put Everything in Writing

- Always PUT THINGS IN WRITING
- Date all documents
- Keep copies
- Maintain a paper trail of communications and agreements
- Request copies of files you do not have — you have the right

Build Accountability

Ensure plans clearly state:

- Who is responsible for what
- Professional/agency responsibilities
- Your responsibilities
- Related services needed

Ensure the Right People Are Present

- Invite all relevant agencies
- Ensure decision-makers attend
- Include anyone involved in your family member's life

Confirm Services & Follow-Up

Make sure plans include:

- Trainings
- Follow-up procedures
- Supports
- Related services

Explore All Options

- Carefully review ALL available options
- Ask questions
- Seek clarification until you fully understand

Stay Focused on Your Goal

Your goal:

To secure appropriate services and supports for your family member and your family.

- You have the right to disagree
- Express disagreements calmly and clearly
- Your tone impacts the outcome
- Losing your cool damages credibility
- Never lose your focus

Final Reminder

There are things more important than “winning” an argument.

Stay calm.

Stay prepared.

Stay focused.

Be the advocate your family member needs



*How to Access Services
and the Process*

Starting Early Start

- ❑ If a parent has concerns about their child's development before age 3, they can refer their child to Early Start services for an evaluation
- ❑ Caregivers, doctors, or childcare providers can make referrals also

A child may be eligible for Early Start if they:

- Have a developmental delay of at least 25% in one or more areas
 - Cognitive (learning new things)
 - Communication- Receptive and/or Expressive (talking or understanding language)
 - Social-emotional (getting along with others)

A child may be eligible for Early Start if they:

- Have a developmental delay of at least 25% in one or more areas
 - Adaptive (daily living skills like feeding or dressing)
 - Physical/Motor (movement, vision, or hearing)

A child may be eligible for Early Start if they:

- Have a medical condition that usually causes developmental delays
- Are considered at high risk for a developmental disability

What do Early Start Services look like?

- ❑ Each child eligible for Early Start has a planning team that includes parents or guardians, the VMRC Service Coordinator, and other family members or professionals chosen by the family.
- ❑ Together they create an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) outlining developmental goals and the support needed to help the family meet those goals

What do Early Start Services look like?

- Early Start Program
 - Family-centered early intervention in natural environments (home or community)

What do Early Start Services look like?

- ❑ Infant Development & Early Intervention
 - ❑ Programs supporting cognitive, social, communication, and motor development

What do Early Start Services look like?

- Family Training & Support
 - Guidance and resources for parents to support their child's development

What do Early Start Services look like?

- ❑ Speech, Occupational, and Physical Therapy
 - ❑ Individualized therapies to enhance development and daily functioning

*Special Education is an
“umbrella” of Services,
Not a specific Place*

Services are based on the child's educational needs, and can range from as minimal support as consult services in the classroom to as involved as a placement in a full day, specialized classroom

Assessment

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- District has 15 calendar days to develop assessment plan or send letter of denial (called PWN)
- Parent has 15 calendar days to consent to plan

Assessment

- ❑ After the parent signs, assessments must be completed and IEP meeting held within 60 calendar days- with some exceptions

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- Assessment done using specific tests

What to Consider for Special Education Assessments

The district and parent develop an assessment plan together.

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What needs testing?

Who is testing?

Are the tests appropriate?

What to Consider for Special Education Assessments

- District must assess in all areas of suspected disability

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- District must assess in all areas of suspected disability
- Parent must sign in agreement to plan before assessment

Eligibility

3 Components

1. Child must have an eligible impairment

AND

2. Impairment must affect educational performance

AND

3. The impairment requires special education

Eligibility for Special Education

Intellectual
disability

Speech or
language
impairment

Autism

Other
health
impairments

Deaf-
blindness

Specific
learning
disability

Emotional
disability

Hard of
hearing

Traumatic
brain
injury

Established
Medical
Disability

Multiple
disabilities

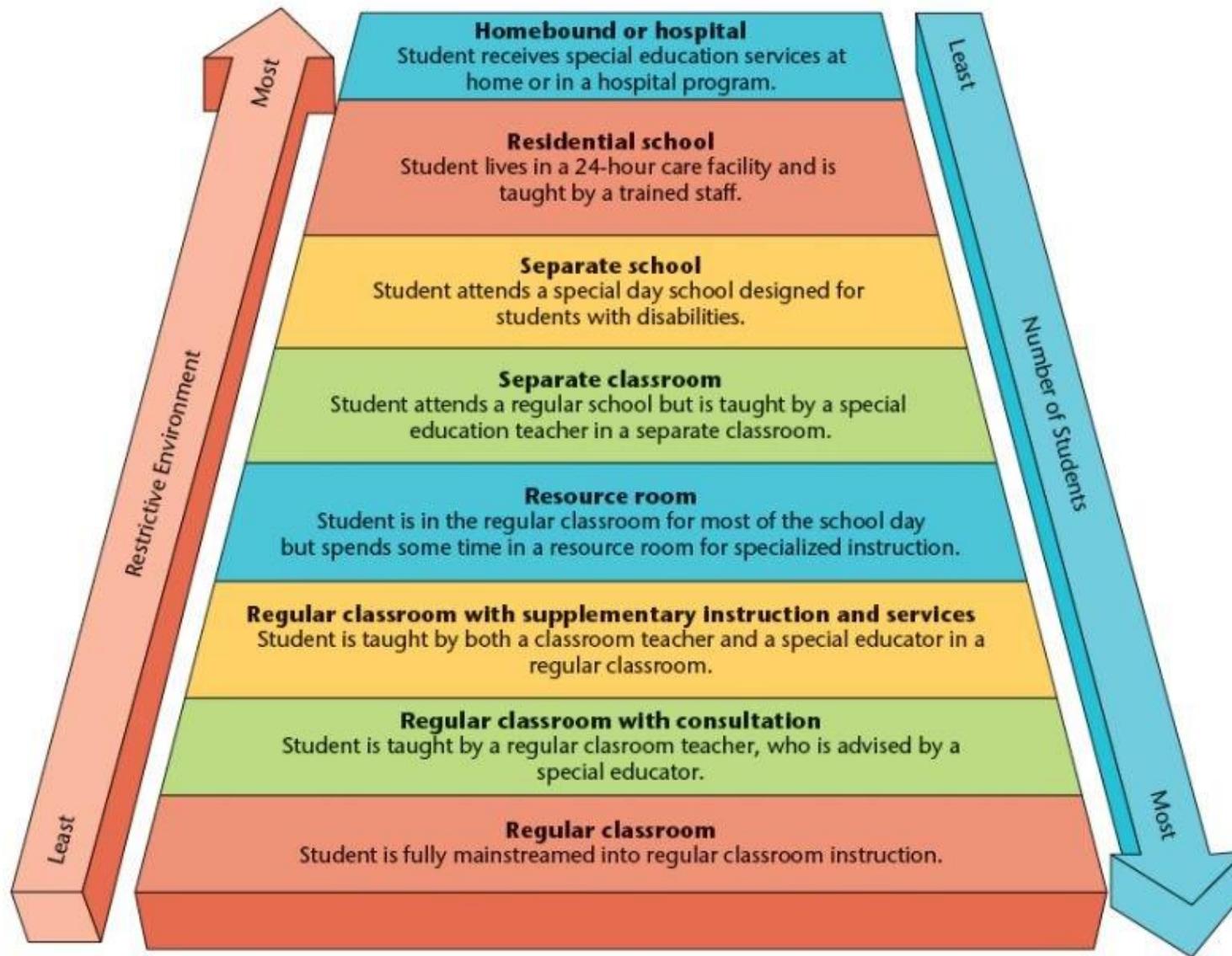
Visual
impairment

Deafness

Orthopedic
impairment

Eligibility for Special Education

1. A student, aged 3 through 22, has one or more of the 13 Federally defined disabling conditions
AND...
2. which adversely affects his/her educational performance



How to Access Services and the Process

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- Is no cost to parent

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- Is not cost to parent
- Provides appropriate services/supports to ensure your child has educational benefit

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I.D.E.A requires the district offer your child an educational program that...

- Is not cost to parent
- Provides appropriate services/supports to ensure your child has educational benefit
- Will help your child make meaningful progress in the general education curriculum

F.A.P.E>

I.D.E.A requires the district offer your child an educational program that...

- Has challenging but attainable goals

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I.D.E.A requires the district offer your child an educational program that...

- Has challenging but attainable goals
- Considers need for Extended School Year (ESY)- Services during the summer



*Basic Parents' Rights in
the IEP Process*

Right to receive a written copy of special education rights

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Right to have child assessed in suspected area(s) of need

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Right to have child assessed in suspected area(s) of need

Parent must give written approval prior to assessment of child in suspected area of need

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Right to have child assessed in suspected area(s) of need

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Right to have the IEP meeting at a mutually agreeable time and place

Right to bring others to the IEP meeting

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Right to audio record the IEP meeting (written notice must be given by parent)

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Right to have the meeting translated into their preferred language

Right to be an active member of the IEP team including identifying child's strengths and areas of need

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Right to bring information from sources other than Education to the IEP table, but the information must indicate an educational need

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Right to actively participate in the creation of the IEP document with IEP team members

Right to have their opinions listened to by IEP team members

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Right to review IEP document for an unspecified amount of time prior to signing the IEP document (or refusing to sign)

Right to use alternative dispute resolution, mediation and/or the fair hearing process

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*Thank you &
Any questions*