

# Navigating the Special Education System

A Crash Course for Parents and Caregivers

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# Important Acronyms

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP: Individualized Education Program

IFSP: Individualized Family Service Plan

LRE: Least Restrictive Environment

MTSS: Multi-Tiered System of Supports

RTI: Response to Intervention

# Early Intervention

- Under IDEA Part C
- Children 0-3 with certain conditions or a developmental delay
  - Missouri: 50% delay required to qualify
- **Focus: promote participation in the family's daily routines**
- IFSP
- Services may include OT, PT, SLP, special instruction, ABA, and others

# Transitioning from Early Intervention to Special Education

- Early Intervention services end the day before the child's third birthday
- Unless the family opts out, the child will be referred to the school district for a special education evaluation
  - About 6 month before the child's third birthday
- May or may not qualify

## Qualifying for Special Education

- Under IDEA Part B
- Must meet criteria for one (or more) of 14 disability categories
  - Must demonstrate an “adverse effect” to their education in order to qualify
- If child meets criteria for qualification, an IEP will be developed
- **Focus: promote participation in education** in the least restrictive environment
- Services may include special education, SLP, OT, PT, ABA, and others
- Placement varies depending on need

# Disability Categories

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Developmental Delay  
(until age 5)
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language  
Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment, Including  
Blindness
- Emotional Disability

## What if my student didn't receive Early Intervention?

- If you suspect your student may have a disability, you can refer them to your school's special education department and request an evaluation
- If a teacher or staff member suspects a disability, the student will go through an intervention period prior to evaluation
  - An evaluation will be recommended if they do not make progress in intervention
  - MTSS and RTI

## After Qualification

- The IEP will be carried out and progress will be sent home periodically
- An annual review will occur at least once per year to update the IEP
- A re-evaluation will occur at least every three years to examine progress and determine whether the student continues to qualify for special education services
- Procedural Safeguards should be provided at every meeting
- Services can be provided until the student turns 22, as long as they continue to qualify



# What can be addressed in the IEP?

- Anything school related
  - Academics, navigating the school building, participation in specials, recess, and lunch, etc.
  - Extra curricular activities often aren't addressed, but they can be
  - Goal: participation in the student's education program
- What can't be addressed?
  - Things that aren't school related (e.g., student has difficulty going to the store)
    - Exception: transition planning
  - Concerns that are more medical in nature
    - Example: School can't create a seizure plan, but a seizure plan provided by the student's medical provider can be put in the IEP for staff to carry out

## Structure of an IEP

- Present Levels
- Changes in Current Functioning
- Services and Minutes
- Placement
- Goals
- Accommodations and Modifications
- Review of the most recent evaluation results
- Transition plan (if 14 or older)

# Questions to Ask During Annual Review Meetings

- What curriculum or program are you using to teach my student \_\_\_\_? How are you differentiating or modifying it, if needed?
- How are you supporting my student's independence in daily activities at school (e.g., toileting, taking care of their materials, etc.)?
- What accommodations or modifications are in place? Are they being carried out across settings?
- What does my student do at recess? How are you supporting his/her participation?
- Does my student have peers that he/she sits by at lunch? How are you supporting his/her socialization?
- Are related services pushing into the classroom/natural environment or pulling my student out? Why?
- How are you supporting my student's transition into adulthood?
- What can I do at home to support my student's success at school?
- How often is my student in the special education environment and how often are they in the general education environment? What is participation like in each setting?

## Questions to Ask During Domains/RED Meetings

- Why are you evaluating (or re-evaluating) in this area?
- Why aren't you evaluating (or re-evaluating) in this area?
- What assessments or evaluation methods do you plan to use?
- How will you ensure the information is an accurate reflection of my child's abilities?
- How will you gather information about my child's performance in non-academic areas (e.g., lunch participation)?
- Is there any information from me that would be helpful to have?
  - Medical information, documentation from outside service providers, etc.

## Questions to Ask During Evaluation and Re-Evaluation Meetings

- What is the average score on this assessment? Where does my student's score fall in relation to that?
- What does this score mean? How is my child's ability to participate in school impacted?
- Is this an area I can expect to see progress in? If not, what are you doing to make sure my student is still successful at school?
- How are these results informing my child's IEP?
- What does \_\_\_\_ (e.g., working memory, visual motor integration, expressive language, etc.) mean? How is it related to my student's success at school?

## What if my student doesn't qualify?

- They may qualify for a 504 Plan
  - Under the ADA
  - Provides accommodations and supports to students in schools
- They may qualify for intervention under MTSS and/or RTI
- They may be more suitable for outpatient rather than school based services
- Ask about other options!
- Trust that the staff has your student's interests at heart

# Questions?

Resources:

IDEA: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>

MO DESE Special Education: <https://dese.mo.gov/special-education>

MO DESE Early Intervention: <https://dese.mo.gov/childhood/early-intervention>

St. Louis Arc: <https://www.slarc.org>

Adaptive Sports:

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.mopt.org/resource/resmgr/conferences/2017\\_spring\\_conference/handouts\\_&\\_presentations/St\\_Louis\\_Adaptive\\_Sport\\_Web.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.mopt.org/resource/resmgr/conferences/2017_spring_conference/handouts_&_presentations/St_Louis_Adaptive_Sport_Web.pdf)

Easter Seals: <https://www.easterseals.com>

We Rock the Spectrum: <https://werockthespectrumfentonmo.com>

Artists First: <https://www.artistsfirststl.org/youth-open-studio.html#/>

Unlimited Play: <https://unlimitedplay.org>