

## Special Needs Information

The services provided and quality of care for students with special needs may vary greatly from school to school. We encourage you to engage with the school, make a list of your questions and allow them to address your questions. Understanding what the process is and what services can be offered are an essential step in determining if your child's and family's needs will be met by the school system.

Each school type will have its own way of supporting students with special needs and or learning differences. It is crucial to try to get a clear and honest picture of what those services will entail and how the school will be able to support your child. Not every school is equipped to support every child's needs.

### STEPS TO FIND A SCHOOL THAT BEST FITS YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

1. **IDENTIFY** what your child's educational needs are that will help them learn. Public schools have what they call "CHILD FIND" which is a process required by law, by ALL public schools to identify any potential students who may qualify for Special Education services.
2. Have your child **EVALUATED**. Evaluations typically come in the form of a Psychoeducational Assessment. These can be done by a school psychologist or other independent, trained professional.
3. **INFORM** the school and ask the school what accommodations they can offer your child. What do their services look like on their campus for students with similar needs?
4. **DETERMINE** if the school can offer an environment that will cover all or most of your child's needs.

### VISITING A SCHOOL SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Taking a guided school tour will certainly give you an opportunity to get a sense of the environment and ask more extensive questions. It is the best way to gain insight into the school culture and climate. You will be able to observe both student-to-teacher and student-to-student interactions. While no school is "perfect" there absolutely are schools that are not suitable or equipped to meet your child's needs.

### QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS TO ASK SCHOOLS

- What is the student-to-teacher ratio...particularly in self-contained classrooms?
- What are the school's/principal's thoughts on inclusion?
- Do students with special needs spend all or part of their time in self-contained classrooms?
- What kind of modifications and accommodations can and cannot be offered or provided?
- What is the school's behavior plan and is it different for students with special needs?
- Are the teachers and staff trained to meet your child's needs?
- In case of medical need, is there a nurse on site full-time?
- How are students identified, assessed, and evaluated within their school?
- Who is the point person for a parent (school psychologist, school counselor, or other)?

- How is progress measured and reported to parents?
- How is an IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) reviewed and updated each year.

### **WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION?**

Special education is instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. This means education that is individually developed to address a specific child's needs that result from the child's disability. Since each child is unique, it is difficult to give an overall example of special education. It is individualized for each child.

### **FREE AND APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION (FAPE)**

"FAPE means special education and related services that are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; meet the standards of the [State]; include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education; and are provided in conformity with an individualized education program (IEP)." [34 C.F.R. § 300.17]

### **HOW ARE STUDENTS IDENTIFIED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE DIFFERENT SCHOOL TYPES?**

#### **Traditional Public Schools**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '04) requires Public Education Agencies (PEA) to locate, identify, and evaluate all children with disabilities, from birth through age 21, located within their boundaries of responsibility who are in need of early intervention or special education services.

#### **Charter Schools (Public)**

Charter Schools are public schools; therefore, they have the same responsibility to make a free appropriate public education (FAPE) available to all students with disabilities. Charter schools will identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities within their population who are in need of special education and related services.

#### **Private Schools**

Public Education Agencies (PEAs) have an affirmative, ongoing obligation to locate, identify, and evaluate all children with disabilities who are enrolled by their parents in private, including religious, elementary, and secondary schools. The school district within whose boundaries the non-profit private school is located is responsible for CHILD FIND activities. Families should contact their public boundary school for direction and procedure. [AZ Dept of Ed: Special Education in Private Schools](#)

#### **Homeschools**

Homeschooled students are considered private school students – § 15-763(C) therefore, the school district within whose boundaries the homeschool is located is responsible for child find activities. Families should contact their public boundary school for direction and procedure.

## Additional Resources

### 10 BASIC STEPS FOR PARENTS RE: SPECIAL EDUCATION

[A helpful guide to all things Special Education in School](#) provided by Raising Special Kids AZ

### STATE OF ARIZONA SPECIAL EDUCATION GUIDES AND INFORMATION

[Arizona Department of Education \(Exceptional Student Services - ESS\)](#)

[AZ CHILD FIND FAQs](#)

[Traveling the Special Education Highway in AZ \(17 page PDF\)](#)

[Viajando por la Carretera de Educación Especial en AZ \(SPANISH Version\)](#)

[Do you have Concerns about your Child's progress in school?](#)

[¿Tiene preocupaciones sobre el progreso de su hijo en la escuela? \(SPANISH Version\)](#)

[Special Education Process in Arizona \(Flowchart\)](#)

[Special Education Information](#)

[Informacion de Educacion Especial \(SPANISH Version\)](#)

[AZ Dept of Ed: Special Education in Private Schools](#)

### ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE SUPPORT AND RESOURCES TO PARENTS

[Autism Society of Southern AZ](#): School Options for children with Autism in So. Arizona

[Child Mind Institute](#): Quality content on mental health (and other) issues and how parents can best support

[Raising Special Kids AZ](#): Arizona organization with resources for parents raising a child with disabilities (Birth to 26 years)

[Autism Society of Southern AZ](#): School Options for children with Autism in So. Arizona

[AZ Special Education Advocacy and Support Organizations](#): List of AZ organizations to support parents

[PACER Center - Champions for Children with Disabilities](#): Provides individual assistance, workshops, resources

[Parent Alliance for Students with Exceptional Needs](#)

[Southern Arizona Network for Downe's Syndrome](#)

### PARENT FAQs AND OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION

[Questions Often Asked by Parents About Special Education Services](#)

[10 Things to Look for in a School for a student with Special Needs](#)

[Key Terms in Special Education](#)

[What is Free and Appropriate Public Education \(FAPE\)?](#)

[Parenting a Child with Special Needs: Your Educational Rights](#)

[Article: Tips for Helping a Special Needs Child Change Schools](#)

[Transition to Kindergarten for Special Needs Child](#)

### VIDEOS

[Steps to Choosing a school for a student with Special Needs](#)

[Touring Schools for Your Special Needs Child](#)