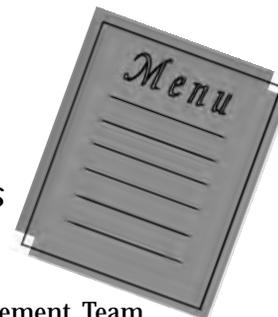


May I Have the Menu Please?

Special Education Placement Considerations and Service Options

By Donna Martinez, M.A., Special Education Teacher, Fairfax County Public Schools



For some parents, participating in their children's individual education planning (IEP) meetings is much like dining in a restaurant where they speak another language: a waiter offers a menu in undecipherable terms, describing only the specialty of the house. Like diners in such a restaurant, parents of children with disabilities, often wonder if there are other possibilities or options for their children that have not yet been explored — and how to find out about them. This article offers help in translating the “menu” of options and resources available for children with disabilities in Virginia, especially for youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities (E/BD) or mental disorders.

Legislation

Federal legislation and state law directs Virginia's school divisions to ensure that students with disabilities, including troubled youth, have access to the general education curriculum using scientifically based instruction in an appropriate placement. Three different measures provide the educational framework for children with special needs: the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), and the Comprehensive Services Act (CSA).

NCLB assures that all students receive a quality and measurable education through the Standards of Learning (SOL) curriculum of Virginia; IDEA 2004 guarantees that students who qualify for special education receive the supports and services needed to access the general education curriculum; and the CSA in Virginia helps state and local agencies, parents, and private service providers work together to plan, coordinate, and provide supports to meet the many special needs. Included in the sphere of CSA assistance is residential placement to children in — or at risk of — foster care and children with behavior or emotional problems.

A Team Approach

Child-centered education, service and support plans for at-risk students and students with disabilities use a team approach that focuses on the strengths and needs of the individual youth and families. The support teams may include the youth, parents and staff from the public schools, as well as private providers, community services boards, courts service units, the departments of health and social services, and others. Under CSA the

Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT) coordinates community agency efforts, manages the available funds, and sees that eligible youths and their families get help. The Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) determines the services to provide, and prepares a service plan with input from families. Under IDEA 2004, the individual education planning (IEP) team determines the youth's measurable education goals and their specific objectives that demonstrate ability and knowledge. The teams collaboratively plan and link to community resources with an agreed upon vision, organizational goals, strategies, or expected outcomes for the child.

Placement Options

IDEA 2004 provides for a continuum of placement (setting of instruction as opposed to school of attendance) options for students requiring needed special education services determined by agreement of the IEP team. Placement may be in district or out of district based upon the needs of the student and agreement by the IEP team. They are:

- **General Education Classes:** Students receive special education services while participating in the general education classroom. Examples of this would be a classroom with both special and general education teachers instructing as a team (team-taught) or an instructional assistant made available for in-class support.

- **Special Education Classes:** Students participate in classes specifically designed for students with disabilities taught by a special education teacher. Services may be offered at the home school or other location that provides special education classes and services.

- **Public Day Schools:** Students receive their education in a day school setting staffed entirely by special education teachers and attended only by students receiving special education services.

- **Private Day Schools:** Students attend privately owned and operated day schools contracted to provide services determined by an IEP team only when there is agreement that the continuum within the school division does not include a placement that can meet the special education needs of the students.

- **Residential Treatment Centers/ Schools:** When the IEP Team agrees that a placement within the continuum of a public school division or the private day school cannot meet students' special education needs, students receive contracted out-of-home placement and services

of their special education and related services in publicly or privately operated residential schools or residential medical facilities on an inpatient basis.

State Operated Program: Students reside in facilities that are the responsibility of state boards, agencies, or institutions and provide education services. Examples of this placement option are the Virginia Treatment Center for Children (VTCC). It also includes Commonwealth Department of Juvenile Correctional Centers. These schools operate as local educational agencies (LEA) just as any other school division.

Home Based Instruction: Special education instruction is delivered to students in the home setting (or other agreed upon setting). Though some assume students with severe E/BD require more restrictive placement to be successful in school, one study (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005) indicated little statistical difference between students in a special day class compared to students in a separate school.

Service Delivery Options

Public special education services that students receive during the school day are mandated to be free and appropriate (FAPE) and in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Service delivery options refer to the type of professional who instructs the student and the type of educational involvement that an adult has with the child. Levels of service delivery available include services:

- by a consultant or monitor who collaborates with the general education teacher;
- in general education provided by a special education teacher on an intermittent or as-needed basis (e.g., to help organize the student, assist with a project);
- in general education, but with regularly scheduled special education classes (e.g., team-taught class, regularly scheduled lesson taught by special education teacher);
- in a special education setting on an intermittent basis, also known as “pull-out,” often for subject review, or test administration; and
- in a “self-contained” special education setting on a regularly scheduled basis which may be subject-specific or may be for the entire day.

Related Services

Related services help the child with a disability

benefit from special education and include developmental, therapeutic, corrective, and other supportive services. For the child at risk or with behavioral and emotional health needs, the services “wrap around” the child and family to assure success in school and home. They may include but are not limited to:

- Psychological services
- Counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling
- Medical services for diagnostic\or evaluation purposes
- School health services
- Social work services in schools
- Parent counseling and training
- Transportation.

Additional Education Tools

Besides Standards of Learning instruction, students with E/BD often need other instruction and specific educational strategies. Jolivette, Stichter, Nelson, Scott, and Liaupsin, (2000) recommend the following strategies for improving post-school outcomes:

- Instruction in effective social skills;
- Implementation of positive behavioral supports;
- Use of problem-solving school teams with built-in administrative support;
- Implementation of prevention focused, validated strategies (e.g., direct instruction and social skills instruction on expected appropriate school behaviors) based on team decisions;
- Matching both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors with the contexts in which the behaviors occur;
- Systematic focus on and reinforcement of appropriate behaviors within multiple school environments; and
- Vocational training.

When the education and/or community services team members work together, they each bring to the table resources and strong support for youth with disabilities and their families. By knowing the options available, examining the possibilities, and as needed, thinking outside the box to initiate new means of support, our youth with disabilities will be ready to meet the future wherever their roads lead them. ■

Related Web Sites, Resources & Contacts

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
www.pbis.org/main.htm

Related Services by Pacer Center:
www.fape.org/pubs/fape_33.pdf

Best Practices:
www.csa.state.va.us/html/best_practices/bestpracticespage.cfm

Virginia Comprehensive Services Act
www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Sped/csa.html and www.csa.state.va.us

Voices for Virginia's Children
www.vakids.org
See Also: Margaret Nimmo, Action Alliance For Virginia's Children And Youth
Issues in Children's Mental Health
www.vakids.org/Health/mh-paper.pdf

Virginia Commission on Youth - Collection of Evidence-Based Treatment Modalities for Children And Adolescents with Mental Health Treatment Needs
coy.state.va.us/Modalities/contents.htm