

identifying disabilities

Child Find

Accessing Services for Children Age 2-3 Years and Older

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In the commonwealth of Virginia, children between the ages of two and three with developmental delays can receive services through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Early Intervention for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and their Families. But two-year-olds and three-year-olds with disabilities must receive services through Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Special Education. Using the umbrella term "Child Find," localities in the state identify, locate, and evaluate children in the state who may have a disability and would benefit from special education.

There are a number of ways for children to participate in Child Find services. For families receiving Part C services, their service coordinators help them navigate the transition from early intervention to special education. Parents may call the Child Find office in their area and ask for a screening and/or evaluation. For children already in school, parents may ask the child's teacher or other school professional for an evaluation. Or a health care professional or anyone else familiar with the child's development may make a referral to Child Find. Regardless of how a child enters Child Find, parental consent is needed before the child may be evaluated. Timelines that determine how soon a child may be evaluated after a screening or referral have to follow federal guidelines. Ask for a written copy of those timelines and your rights during the Child Find process when you first ask that your child be evaluated.

The Virginia Department of Education has written *A Parent's Guide to Special Education* that details these regulations. It's avail-

able on the Web at: www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/special.html or by calling 1-800-422-2083 or 1-800-422-1098 (TDD).

Child Find determines if children are eligible for special education because they are identified as children with disabilities. While public schools are responsible for Child Find activities, services are not limited to public school students. The law requires that each school division locate, identify and evaluate — among others — all private school children with disabilities who reside in the jurisdiction, including children attending religious schools and children who are home instructed or home tutored.

Local Implementation

If the Child Find process determines a disability exists and the child needs special education services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed by the IEP team. The IEP team comprises, at a minimum, the child's parent(s), a general education teacher, a special educator, and a school principal or designee. The IEP team determines the educational goals that the child will try to reach in the coming year, how special education will help the child reach the goals, how the goals will be measured, if the child needs related services (physical or occupational therapy, for example) to meet those goals, and the extent to which the child will participate in the general curriculum. Each IEP is a unique document. The IEP enables teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and the student (as appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for the child with the disability.

Undoubtedly, the IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability. It guides the delivery of special education supports and services for the student with a disability. But it's important to note that while the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires certain information be included on the IEP, states and school systems have flexibility in designing their own forms. IEP forms may look a little different in each school system in Virginia.

Children who are between the ages of two and five are served through the school system's preschool or home resource programs. In all localities except for Fairfax, children must have turned two before the cutoff date for the year in which they will start receiving special education services through the schools. Contact the individual school districts for information about that cutoff date. In Fairfax, a child may begin receiving special education services anytime during the school year after the child has turned two. ■

For more information contact:

Programs for Children with Disabilities: Ages 2 through 5
Office of Special Education Services,
Department of Education
P.O. Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218-2120
804-225-2675
www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/special.html

The Special Education Directory on p. 54 lists contact numbers for Child Find offices in our distribution area.