

Special Education

Parent Handbook



**PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
FOR
SPECIAL EDUCATION
(PAC)
IONIA COUNTY ISD
PHONE: (616) 527-4900**

"Your Parent Partners in Special Education"

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT HANDBOOK

Letter to Parents:

Dear Parents:

We invite you to become acquainted with the programs, people, and organizations available to help you and your child.

This handbook was developed for parents of students with disabilities. More information about state and federal laws protecting the rights of special education students is available on the Michigan Department of Education website as well as in the letter from the Michigan Director of Special Education. Additional copies are available upon request from your local school district or the Ionia County ISD.

The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) welcomes you to attend our meetings. A schedule is available from the Ionia County ISD Special Education Office (616-527-4900).

If you would like additional information after reviewing this handbook, please contact your local school district, the Ionia County ISD, or call Ionia County ISD for the name of your PAC representative.

Sincerely,

Natalie Fuller, Ed.S.
Associate Superintendent Special Education

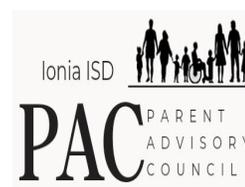


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HOW TO OBTAIN SERVICES

If you think your child might qualify for special education services, call your school district. The director or supervisor for special education programs and services in your district is listed below:

Belding Area Schools:

Beth Hudson
Director of Special Education
616-794-4101

Ionia Public Schools:

James Nuse
Director of Special Education
616-527-9280

Jennifer Woodhams
Special Education Coordinator
616-527-9280

Ionia County ISD:

Natalie Fuller
Associate Superintendent Special Education
616-527-4900

Trisha Hassett
Administrator of Accountability & Program Improvement
616-527-4900

Cyndi Geiger
Administrator of Accountability & Program Improvement
616-527-4900

Mark Sly
Administrator of Accountability & Program Improvement
MoCI & Transition Supervisor
616-489-2116

Lakewood Public Schools:

Jenny Richardson
Director of Special Education
616-374-8043

Portland Public Schools:

Sarah Dawson
Director of Special Education
517-647-4161

Saranac Community Schools:

Sarah Milbratz
Director of Special Education
616-642-1400

A list of special education administrators that includes addresses and fax numbers is available from the Ionia County ISD Special Education Department 616-527-4900.

Special Education Services

WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION?

Special Education is specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

WHY DOES MY CHILD NEED AN EVALUATION?

The evaluation is done to answer these questions:

- Does the child have a disability?
- How is the child currently performing in school? (present level of academic achievement and functional performance)
- What are the child's educational needs?
- Does the child need special education and related services?
- What additions or modifications, if any, are needed to enable the child to meet annual goals in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and participate, as appropriate, in the general curriculum?

WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS?

Before a child is evaluated for the first time, the school must notify the parent and describe any evaluation the school proposes to conduct. The parent must give informed consent for the child to be evaluated.

The next step involves gathering and reviewing existing information on the child by an IEP Team. This includes consideration of current classroom assessments, observations, and information provided by parents and school staff.

HOW IS A CHILD EVALUATED FOR THE PRESENCE OF A DISABILITY?

The testing is done individually in the child's native language. The standardized tests must be used correctly and fairly and be administered by trained, knowledgeable personnel.

WHO DECIDES IF A CHILD IS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES?

After the evaluation has been completed, the IEP Team, consisting of qualified professionals and the parent, will decide if the child is eligible for special education.

WHO IS A "CHILD WITH A DISABILITY?"

The definition includes the following qualifications:

- Children from birth through age 25 who have not graduated with a regular high school diploma.
- Children who have the characteristics for a specific disability as defined in the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education. (See the special education categories listed on page 8 of this handbook.)
- Children who, because of that disability, need special education and related service support.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A CHILD/STUDENT IS FOUND ELIGIBLE?

Another role of the IEP Team is to develop the student's program or Individualized Education Program (IEP). As stated earlier, the IEP Team is comprised of the parents, school professionals, and the student, when appropriate. After the IEP is developed, the student begins to receive special education and related services per what was agreed upon by the IEP Team.

WHAT IS AN IEP?

An "Individualized Education Program" means a written plan for a student with a disability that spells out the special education and related services the student will receive. The IEP is developed at a meeting that is scheduled at a mutually agreeable time. The written document is a record of the IEP Team meeting. The IEP is reviewed at least once a year.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE IEP?

The requirements include:

- a statement of the student's present level of academic achievement and functional performance;
 - a statement of measurable annual goals and short-term objectives that address:
 - 1) how to help the student be involved in and progress in the general curriculum, and
 - 2) how to meet each of the student's other educational needs related to his/her disability;
 - a statement of how the student's progress toward the annual goals will be measured and how the parents will be regularly informed of that progress;
 - a statement of special education programs/services and supplementary aids to be provided to the student, and any program modifications or supports for the school personnel;
 - the projected starting date for services as well as the duration, anticipated frequency, and location of where programs and services will be delivered;
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- an explanation of when the student will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and other activities;
 - a statement of any modifications the student would need to take the state- and/or district-wide assessment tests; (If the IEP Team determines that the test is not appropriate for the student, a different assessment will be used.)
 - a statement of transition services beginning at age 16. Transition services include other aspects of adult life and often involve other agencies.

WHAT IS LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE)?

LRE looks at the setting in which the student receives an education. The law presumes that students with disabilities are most appropriately educated with their nondisabled peers in the general education setting. Attending special classes or separate schools, or removing students with disabilities from the regular classroom occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability prevents the student from achieving satisfactorily even when supplementary aids and services are used.

WHAT IS A "FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION" (FAPE)?

FAPE means that education and related services are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge. The services provided must meet the standards of the Department of Education for all students and be designed to meet the student's IEP goals and short-term objectives.

HOW DOES A PARENT PARTICIPATE IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS?

Parents are encouraged to be involved in a variety of ways:

- Parents are key members in all decision-making meetings such as meetings that determine the identification, evaluation, educational placement, reevaluation, and the appropriate education of the student.
- Parents give consent for initial evaluations and reevaluations.
- Parents will receive regular reports on their student's progress.
- Parents must notify the school district if they intend to remove their student from the public school or plan to request a due process hearing.
- Parents are encouraged to be involved in parent groups at the local level or at the ISD level through an advisory group called the Parent Advisory Committee for Special Education (PAC). The Michigan Department of Education also involves parents in planning, implementing and reviewing activities.

SHOULD THE STUDENT BE INVOLVED IN THE IEP?

Students often provide valuable insights regarding their strengths and needs. When they are involved in determining their own goals and objectives, they are more committed to achieving them. Each student should have the option to be a part of the IEP Team process.

Students should participate in their own transition planning by age 14, or younger if appropriate. These plans are updated annually.

Students who are age 17 are notified that their rights will be transferred to them upon reaching the age of majority (18). At age 18 both the student and parents are notified that the rights are transferred to the student.

WHAT TRANSPORTATION SERVICE DOES A DISTRICT PROVIDE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS?

The same transportation services available to general education students are available to special education students. In addition, specialized transportation services are provided by school districts if the IEP Team determines that the student needs those services to receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). The school district's responsibilities related to transportation include providing safe and efficient transportation for students, furnishing any specialized services documented on a student's IEP (such as a lift bus or safety harness), and following appropriate safety, medical, and traffic rules and procedures.

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION OF MY SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD?

It is important for parents/guardians to read transportation policies and procedures provided by their district or transportation office and to discuss those policies with your son/daughter, when possible. Besides reinforcing safety rules, it is the responsibility of parents to assist their child to the bus if he/she cannot travel independently between the residence and the bus due to physical problems, immature development, or inaccessibility of the residence. When a student is returned from school, a responsible person must be at home unless the parent/guardian has given written permission to leave an older student alone. Teamwork, communication, and cooperation between parents and schools are important in achieving safe transportation of students.

WHAT ARE THE PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS?

They are legal safeguards that protect the rights of students with disabilities and their parents. They provide the information that parents need to make decisions about their student's education. They explain the procedures used to resolve disagreements between parties. The Procedural Safeguards in this book are from state and federal rules and regulations. Sometimes they are difficult to understand. If you have any questions regarding them, please contact Ionia County ISD, your local school district, or sources listed in this handbook.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Each local school district and charter school must provide or contract for appropriate special education programs and/or services for students identified as having:

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** – Children with a restricted range of interests and impairments in social and communication skills.
- **Cognitive Impairment (CI)** – Children who are delayed in their mental development.
- **Deaf-Blindness (DB)** – Children who have both hearing and visual impairments.
- **Early Childhood Developmental Delay (ECDD)** – Children through age five with developmental delays whose impairment cannot be identified under any other category.
- **Emotional Impairment (EI)** – Children with behaviors and/or emotional issues that interfere with their learning.
- **Hearing Impairment (HI)** – Children who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- **Learning Disability (LD)** – Children with disorders in the process of learning.
- **Other Health Impairment (OHI)** – Children with other health impairments that interfere with learning.
- **Physical Impairment (PI)** – Children with physical impairments that interfere with learning.
- **Severe Multiple Impairment (SXI)** – Children who have both mental and physical impairments.
- **Speech and Language Impairment (SLI)** – Children who have not developed appropriate speech, language, or communication skills.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)** – Children with a head injury that interferes with their learning.
- **Visual Impairment (VI)** – Children who are blind or partially sighted.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team, of which you are a member, determines which programs and/or services are appropriate for each student. The IEP Team also determines how much time is spent in general and special education.

A continuum of alternative placements is available through your local school district or charter school. Examples of the types of programs/services available include Teacher Consultant services, Resource Rooms, specialized classrooms, and a variety of related services.

If the IEP Team determines that one or more related services are needed for your student, each intermediate school district, local school district, or charter school must provide or contract for the following:

- Audiology Services
- Occupational Therapy
- Orientation and Mobility Services
- Physical Therapy
- Psychological Services
- School Social Work Services
- Speech/Language/Communication Therapy
- Transportation
- Other related services as determined by the IEP Team

WHAT IF I HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT MY CHILD'S SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES?

For most students and families, standard Home-School Communication Methods such as progress reports, daily logs, email, phone calls, IEP meetings and conferences provide ample and effective opportunity to address concerns that may arise. In some instances, however, other strategies may be necessary. You may choose to contact your teachers or ancillary staff in writing or by email if you believe your child needs different or additional services and supports. A parent can, at any time, request an IEP Meeting using a dated letter or email. In this instance, send an additional copy of your request to someone else on your IEP Team or in your district. Explain in detail the purpose for convening the IEPT Meeting. There is no requirement to wait for the scheduled annual review.

If you still have a concern or need to bring additional attention to your concern, contacting the Special Education Supervisor or Director for your district or the school principal by phone, email, or dated written correspondence can be effective. You may also choose to contact Ionia County Intermediate School District for guidance or assistance. This can be done through the website www.ioniaisd.org, by phone (616.527.4900), by email or in writing. Services from Ionia County Intermediate School District are free and can be very helpful.

LIST OF OTHER PRINTED RESOURCES AVAILABLE FROM IONIA COUNTY ISD:

- Ionia County ISD Special Education Plan, including a chart which describes the type of programs and services currently available in Ionia County ISD
- List of local special education administrators that includes address, telephone numbers, and fax numbers
- Ionia County ISD *OHI Spectrum Disorder Guidelines*
- Ionia County ISD *Occupational Therapy Guidelines*
- Ionia County ISD *Speech and Language Guidelines*
- Ionia County ISD *Specific Learning Disability Guidelines*
- Ionia County ISD *School Social Worker Guidelines*
- Seclusion and Restraint
- Information about *Early On* of Ionia County, a collaboration between several agencies to serve children between birth and three years old.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENTS

The ARC Kent County

Phone: (616) 459-3339

<http://www.arckent.org>

Michigan Department of Education

Phone: (517) 373-3324

<http://www.michigan.gov/mde>

**Special Education Information Line, M-F 9a-4p
888-320-8384**

Michigan Protection and Advocacy

Phone: (800) 288-5923

<http://www.mpas.org>

SERVICES FOR YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER

Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Phone: (800) 466-8084 or (616) 458-1187
<http://www.abvimichigan.org>

Autism Society of Michigan

Phone: (800) 223-6722 or (517) 882-2800
<http://www.autism-mi.org>

The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education

<http://www.cadeworks.org/>

Children and Adults with AD/HD (CHADD)

Phone: (616) 874-5662
<http://www.chadd.org>

Children's Special Health Care Services (CSHCS)

Phone: (616) 527-5200
<http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/>

Down Syndrome Association of West Michigan

Phone: (866) 665-7451 or (616) 956-3488
<http://www.dsawm.org>

Early On of Ionia County

Phone: (616) 527-4900
<http://www.ioniaisd.org/earlychildhood/>

Easter Seals Michigan, Inc.

Phone: (800) 292-2729 or (616) 942-2081
<http://www.easterseals.com>

Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

Phone: (616) 742-0200
<http://www.hispanic-center.org>

Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan

Phone: (888) 597-7809 or (517) 485-8160
ldafmichigan@gmail.com
<http://www.ldaoofmichigan.org>

Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS)

Phone: (616) 242-6450
<http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs>

NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

It is the policy of the school district that no person shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed or ancestry, political belief, sex, disability, religion, age, height, weight, or marital status be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity and in employment. Any questions concerning Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, Title VI, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin, or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, should be directed to the director of special education listed on page 1 of this document.