



What Is Special Education?

According to the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004**, special education is the specially designed instruction and related services required to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Under this important federal law, all DC public schools must provide a free, **appropriate** public education to every student. IDEA also mandates that students learn in the **least restrictive environment** possible. This means that children with disabilities are taught and assessed alongside their peers without disabilities to the greatest extent possible and are removed from these settings only when the nature of their disability impedes their progress in general education. Alternative assessments are made available to students who fit the criteria, with modifications or accommodations in order to ensure success. To meet these needs, students may have a special education teacher alongside a general education teacher, or additional specialized classes to support student's academic performance.

Students may be eligible for special education services if they are between the ages of 3 and 21, and are identified as having one of 13 disabilities, including developmental delays, specific learning disabilities, physical or speech impairments, or autism.

What is the Special Education Process?

Students that receive special education services must have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a legal document that developed to ensure a child who has a disability is receiving specialized instruction according to his or her unique needs. Depending on the student, the IEP may include accommodations or modifications to assignments and tests, as well as required services from trained staff.

Before an IEP is assigned, the following steps must take place:

- **A referral** – a request from a parent, counselor, teacher or school administrator for special education services.
- **IEP Evaluation and Eligibility** - student academic/behavioral data is collected and analyzed to see if specialized instruction is needed. This process is usually referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI) at the school level. The length of time of this step varies based on the individual students and schools.
- **IEP Development** - services and supports the student needs are discussed with parents, teachers, and specialists at the school.
- **Implementation of Services and Monitoring** - specialized instruction is executed by teachers and related service providers to provide the free and appropriate education stated in the IEP.





Is DC Meeting the Needs of All Students with Special Needs?

In the 2016-2017 school year, approximately 16% of the 90,000 students in DC public schools received special education services. **According to the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, only one in ten of those students are performing at a college and career ready level by high school, and two-thirds of students with disabilities are not in college or working one year after high school.** This shows there is much work to be done to ensure all of our kids are getting what they need to be successful in life.

In 2014, special education reform was passed to ensure early intervention and screening for more children (which is reported to help up to half of identified students catch up to their peers by kindergarten), faster evaluations, and more comprehensive transition planning upon graduation. Until now, these reforms remained unfunded, leaving schools and families without appropriate resources and support to meet the needs of many students with special needs. In the proposed Fiscal Year 2019 budget, the Mayor has funded these reforms, a major step towards better serving all students in the city.

What is the Cost of Special Education Programs?

The 2013 DC Adequacy Study included a review of special education programs by staff at OSSE, DCPS, and PCSB and outside experts. This team concluded that additional instructional staff—special education teachers, instructional aides, and a part-time adaptive physical education teacher—as well as student support staff—social workers and specialized therapists are needed to address the needs of our students. This would require robust investments in schools, with estimated costs of some of the positions in the chart below:

Position	Estimated Cost
Special Education Teacher	\$104,633
Instructional Aid	\$32,099
Social Worker	\$104,633
Special Education Coordinator	\$101,901

With the responsibility of educating all students in DC, these large but necessary investments will help every student learn, grow and truly meet their full potential.

How Can Parents Get Involved?

- Get involved with PAVE's partners, **Parent Advocate Leaders (PALs) Group** and **Advocates for Justice Reform (AJE)**
- Testify at a public hearing to call for increased special education supports
- Contact PAVE's **community organizing team** at organizers@dcpave.org

Learn More:

- ❖ Go to www.understood.org to learn more about special needs and get resources on how to best support students and families.
- ❖ Read an article from *The Atlantic* taking a critical look at teacher preparation and training around supporting students with special needs: <https://theatlantic.com/2lzwVv6>