

Referral for Special Education Evaluation in Colorado

For 3 through 5-year olds with a Suspected Disability or Delay



Acknowledging Concerns

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law requiring State education agencies to find children who may need early childhood special education to access and make progress in the preschool curriculum.

Families are encouraged to talk with their child's teachers and doctor about their concerns. Family members, medical professionals, and teachers—including those from Head Start or childcare programs—can contact the local Preschool Child Find contact to ask about the evaluation process and [make a referral](#), but evaluation of a child cannot occur until a family provides written permission. **Agreeing to an evaluation does not mean a family agrees to special education services.** The evaluation is free, as are the educational services from the public school system for children who qualify.

Questions and Support

Teachers and school administrators can help families understand the process.

Additionally, each state has a [Parent Training and Information \(PTI\) Center](#) or [Community Parent Resource Center \(CPRC\)](#) where most staff are families of children with disabilities. Center staff can answer questions, help families prepare for meetings, and make informed decisions for their child. If families disagree with a school's decision, they can also explain family rights and potential ways to resolve the dispute.

Referral and Evaluation

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a framework to provide high-quality teaching and differentiated support for all young children. Within that framework, a school district and family can also agree to implement additional strategies or activities before the evaluation occurs. [Response to Intervention \(RTI\)](#) is an approach that some schools may use to provide support and gather additional information about the child before an evaluation. An evaluation cannot be delayed if the school and family do not agree to try other supports or strategies first.

If a child is eligible for services, the school and family work together to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for that child.

Once a school district has received written permission for the evaluation from a family, the school district must complete the evaluation in 60 days. Colorado's timeline for evaluation begins once the Special Education contact receives the family's consent for the evaluation in writing.

The school might decide the child does not need an evaluation but must explain why to the families in writing. Families can consider other services available for their child through their local health department, state, or community program

Referral and Evaluation Information for Your State or Local District

Colorado's Child Find system for children ages 3 through 5 years old is meant to identify children suspected of having a delay in development as early as possible. If a young child is not meeting typical developmental milestones, or someone is concerned about the child's growth or learning, a referral can be made. Starting at age three, the public school system (school districts and/or Boards of Cooperative Educational Services/BOCES) has responsibility for locating children who may have a need for specialized instruction. They will work with the family about their concerns, related to meeting the child's educational needs.

Next steps could include collecting information from families and from previous developmental screenings, conducting a screening, and/or, if the child is suspected of having an educational disability, completing an evaluation.

The purpose of the process is to determine if there is an educational disability that requires special education and related services for the child to make progress in preschool. Child Find is provided at no cost to families.

Contact Information for Your State or Local District

Find your local [Preschool Special Education and Child Find](#) contacts. Families should connect with the Child Find contact in the area in which the family lives or talk with the child's teacher if already enrolled in preschool.

Colorado Department of Education

Exceptional Student Services Unit
1560 Broadway, Suite 500
Denver, CO 80202
303-866-6757

Colorado Department of Early Childhood

Head Start: cdec_headstartinfo@state.co.us
1575 Sherman Street
Denver CO 80202
<https://cdec.colorado.gov/>

Parent Training and Information Center (PTI)

Parent Centers are an invaluable resource for families of children with disabilities. PEAK Parent Center is a nonprofit that works every day to ensure that all people with disabilities are fully included in their neighborhood schools, communities, employment, and all walks of life.

More information on Colorado's Parent Training and Information Center: [Peak Parent Center](#), 719-531-9400

Resources

IDEA Regulations — [34 CFR §300.111 Child Find](#); [34 CFR §300.300 Parental Consent](#); and [34 CFR §300.301 Initial Evaluations](#)

Office of Special Education Programs (2016) — [OSEP Memo 16-07—Response to Intervention \(RTI\) and Preschool Services](#)
[Colorado Department of Education Part B Preschool Child Find Directory](#) – Local Preschool Child Find Contacts for children ages 3 through 5 years.

September 2022

Details provided in partnership with



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