

School Placement

Finding the Right School Placement

Before the first school meeting, make a list of your daughter's classroom options. Check out every setting from the regular neighborhood school to the early childhood classroom to the special needs classroom. If your school district does not have all of these programs available, they are required to provide transportation (if an out-of-district program is the most appropriate for your child). Visit each of these programs and take lots of notes. Visit once when the children are present and re-visit with the teacher when you can talk alone.

Make a list of questions to ask. You will want to know

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- Do they have experience with RS? Children with communication problems?
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- How many months a year does the school run?
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- Are summer programs available?
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- How many days do the children attend class?
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- What are school hours?
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- What professionals are in the classroom?
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- Will she have a personal aide?
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- How many children will be in the class?

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What is the ratio of adult to child in the classroom?

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How far is the restroom? Are there provisions for privacy?

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How many hours of therapy would be available for your child?

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How many room transitions must be made each day?

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Is there a provision for inclusion with typical students?

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What kind of therapies will be provided?

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Does the school have good adaptive equipment?

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What is a typical school day schedule?

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What is the curriculum? Do they do academics? Art and music?

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Will they take field trips?

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Are parents encouraged to participate?

Before you get started, do your homework. Know the law. Call your State Department of Education and request copies of all the laws, programs and school (public and private) listings that you can get. Get a copy of the Parents Rights from the school and read it ahead of time. Fight for what you believe in. As the best experts on their child, parents have enormous power. Don't be intimidated by professionals. You are your child's best advocate and the most important person involved in planning for her.

Make sure to discuss your child's history, her needs, and potential placement in that order. It is illegal for the school to tell you what they have first and then try to fit your daughter into it. Her needs come first, and then placement according to those needs.

The key words to use are "appropriate" and "inappropriate" when discussing her school program. Always talk in terms of your child's needs and provide written documentation for what helps her and what does not. Her program must be based on her needs, not the staff needs; what she needs, not what the budget can afford.

There is no standard RS teaching approach, just as there is no standard CP teaching approach. It must be tailored to her specific needs. If you do disagree with the school's suggested approach, request to go to mediation and due process. Explain why you do not agree that the program they are suggesting is appropriate to your daughter's needs. Stay calm and stick to your guns. Plan to drop in for a short, friendly, informal meeting with the principal, school psychologist, therapists and nurse before the formal meeting. They won't be able to discuss her placement outside of the formal meeting, but you can get valuable information about the program and insight about the school's philosophy and a feel for the school's atmosphere.

If you want your daughter to have a full time aide, make sure to get a doctor's note. The school is protected by law from the delivery of medical services, so they may tell you they don't provide medical care. Make sure the doctor's note is worded from the perspective of your daughter's need to be successful in school.

When it comes to therapies, make them apply to her need to be successful in school. If she needs to have physical assistance to move from one place to another during the school day, it can be used to justify the need for physical therapy. If she needs to be able to sit and attend to be able to learn, they may have to work on balance and focus, etc. Phrase things according to what needs to be done in a school setting, long and short term, and then what supports need to be in place to meet those requirements.

Make sure you have some academic requirements set up before you walk in the door, in the form of cognition, self help, fine motor, gross motor, and speech and social psychology. Base the requirements on things they do in school for kids your daughter's age. That's why it helps to walk around the school -- you'll get better ideas.

If this is her first time in school, try to schedule the meeting well ahead of your daughter's third birthday in case you have to go to mediation. Delivery of services must begin with a designated time after everyone agrees on the services. Take good notes, and put all of your requests to them in writing with a copy to the school's superintendent if you think it is necessary.

What if we don't agree on the delivery of services?

If you don't agree on the delivery of services, ask the therapists what they recommend and why. Get as much information as you can before a review meeting. Keep a "Let's see what we can do to help my daughter" attitude. Ask how getting less services helps your daughter. Provide written documentation of her need for therapies. If the excuse is used that she is "not making progress" in therapy, use the argument that in RS, where loss of mobility is likely, "maintaining is progress."

What if we don't agree on placement?

If you go to mediation or due process, the law states that the school has to keep your daughter in her current program

until the dispute is settled.

How do we decide which program will suit her best?

It is possible that more than one placement would fit her needs. You may want to consider a combination program. For instance, she may benefit from being in the early childhood classroom twice a week and a "regular" preschool twice a week. Or, she may do well in the special needs classroom three times a week and the early childhood classroom twice a week. It is important to take everything into consideration after asking the right questions and discussing the issue with her therapists. Sometimes they can be your best advocates!

How is placement determined?

Once the IEP is developed and the annual goals and short-term objectives have been agreed to, placement must be determined according to these goals and objectives. The student must be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate for her. Considerations for least restrictive environment include:

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The opportunity, to the maximum extent appropriate, to participate with nondisabled age appropriate students in academic, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities.

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A setting as close as possible to which the student would be assigned if she did not have a disability.

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Consideration for the amount of time and the distance she must be transported from her home.

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Removal from the regular educational environment only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved.

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Consideration for any harmful effects the placement may have on the student.

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Provision of the quality of services the student requires.

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Program and services as specified in the student's IEP must be appropriate to meet her needs.

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The same type of placement may not be appropriate at every stage of her life. The Admissions and Release Committee (ARD) should decide together what best meets the student's needs at the time, and as a group develop the IEP. Once the IEP is developed, the committee decides where it can be best implemented. Be sure this isn't the other way around. Placement is determined by the committee usually once a year, but more often if needed. Sometimes the answer is inclusion, other times it is a quiet self-contained classroom. Sometimes it is half a day in each. There are a number of options.

What are options for placement
in the public schools?

Option 1: Direct instruction and/or consultative services within regular/vocational education

Option 2: Direct instruction and/or consultative services within regular/vocational education with content instruction in a resource room

Option 3: Direct instruction and/or consultative services within regular/vocational education with content instruction in a more special education classes

Option 4: Self-contained in a special education classroom with integration as appropriate

Option 5: Self-contained in a special education classroom with no integration in regular public school

Option 6: Separate public day school for students with disabilities

Option 7: Separate private day school for students with disabilities

Option 8: Public and/or private residential facilities

Option 9: Homebound

Option 10: Hospital

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