

# **Preschool Special Education**

## **Answers to commonly asked questions**

Listed below are commonly asked questions by parents going through the preschool referral process. We hope these questions and answers help you during the process.

### **1. What is the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE)?**

It is a decision making committee appointed by the school board to determine eligibility and the appropriate level of services for preschool children ages 3-5 years old. The CPSE is a multidisciplinary team established to conduct meetings to develop, review, or revise the individual education plan (IEP) of a preschool student with a disability.

### **2. What is the Individual Education Plan (IEP)?**

If your child is eligible to receive services as a preschool student with a disability, the CPSE develops an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This IEP is a written plan which specifies the appropriate level of special education programs and services to be provided to meet the unique educational needs of a student with a disability. The IEP includes the following information:

- Demographic information about your child (name, date of birth, parent name, address);
- Classification of your child (preschool student with a disability);
- Present levels of performance based on the evaluation reports submitted;
- Description of your child's needs in the areas of academic achievement, social development, physical development, and management needs;
- Annual goals, short-term objectives, and evaluative criteria to meet the needs of your child;
- Description of the recommended services including a start and end date and the number of times your child will receive the services; services will follow the school calendar – 10 month plan (September to June) or 12 month plan (includes the summer session);
- Description of any specialized equipment or adaptive devices your child needs to benefit from education; and
- A least restrictive environment statement (explained further in # 26).

### **3. Who is the Chairperson of the CPSE?**

The Chairperson is a professional employed by the school district who is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of special education.

### **4. What is the role of the Chairperson?**

The Chairperson is responsible for running the CPSE meeting. They also develop the meeting agenda, send notices to participants, coordinate the development of the IEP, and serve as a resource for parents of preschool children.

### **5. Who are the other members of the CPSE?**

In addition to the Chairperson, the following are also members of the CPSE:

- Parent member/advocate
- Evaluator representative (for those children evaluated for the first time)
- Child's teacher (if applicable)
- Early Intervention Official designee (for those children transitioning from the Early Intervention Program)
- County representative

## **6. Who is the parent advocate of the CPSE?**

A parent member or advocate is a parent of a preschool or elementary child with a disability who resides in the school district. This parent member is knowledgeable about the CPSE and serves as a support to other parents.

## **7. What is my role as parent?**

You know your child best and the CPSE looks to you to provide information about your child's strengths and needs. You are encouraged to be active at the CPSE meeting and ask questions, provide information and feedback, and help us make an appropriate recommendation for your child.

## **8. What is an evaluation?**

Once you have completed and signed the "consent to evaluate" form and returned it to the CPSE chairperson, the evaluation process is ready to begin. The evaluation includes, at no cost to the parent, the following:

- A physical examination – you may use a recent physical from your child's pediatrician (must be within 1 year), as well as a copy of your child's updated immunizations;
- An individual psychological evaluation – the psychologist will use a variety of testing measures to gather information about your child's cognitive or educational performance, these testing measures range from playing with your child, observing your child playing with you and other children, sitting down at a table and asking your child to answer questions and perform tasks such as completing a puzzle, drawing with crayons, looking at pictures, building with blocks.
- A social history which gathers information from you, the parents, about your child's birth history, when they completed developmental milestones (i.e. walking, first word spoken); your child's likes and dislikes, your concerns about your child;
- Any other appropriate assessments or evaluations as necessary to help determine the physical, mental and emotional factors that contribute to the suspected disabilities; these other assessments may include a speech and language evaluation, occupational therapy evaluation, physical therapy evaluation, etc;
- An observation of your child in his current educational setting, if your child is not in a nursery school, day care, Headstart or Pre-K classroom, the evaluator may observe your child in your home or in one of their classes to observe how your child interacts with other children.

## **9. My child just has a speech delay. Why does my child need such a thorough evaluation?**

Certain evaluation components are mandated by the State (i.e. psychological and social history). These give the CPSE a broader picture of your child and the educational impact of the suspected disability. If your child was in Early Intervention and has had current assessments (within the last 6 months) for speech, PT, or OT then the CPSE may choose to accept these assessments instead of re-evaluating your child again in these areas.

## **10. How can I prepare for the evaluation?**

Your child will not need any preparation for the evaluation. You will need to be prepared to answer questions regarding: your child's birth history, how old your child was when he/she first crawled, walked, ran, babbled, said first words, put words together, ate solid foods, began potty training, etc. It is also helpful to get feedback from your child's pediatrician about your child's development, as well as any information from others that are familiar with your child (day care provider, family, friends). If you have them, remember to bring copies of recent physical examinations and immunization records to the evaluation.

## **11. How are evaluations structured?**

Each evaluating agency has their own style of conducting evaluations, such as:

- A team approach or arena style where professionals play with your child together and each assess your child from their own discipline; one person may serve as the lead tester because your child has developed a bond with this person and allows the other evaluators to sit back and observe while one person assesses your child;
- An individual approach where each professional evaluates your child one-on-one, separate from the other evaluators;
- A combination of the two approaches.

The length of an evaluation also varies according to each evaluating agency and your child. An average length of time is approximately 2 hours. Some evaluating agencies do their evaluations on one day while others spread their evaluations over several days.

## **12. How do I select an evaluating agency to evaluate my child?**

Each evaluating agency on the selection list is approved by the New York State Education Department to conduct multidisciplinary evaluations. This means that each evaluator has many of the following staff to be part of the evaluation: psychologist, speech and language pathologist, special education teacher, occupational therapist, and physical therapist. Since each evaluating agency is approved to conduct similar evaluations, you may wish to choose an evaluator who has an earlier appointment, is closer to your home, or does the evaluation at a time and place of your choice.

## **13. Once I have my child evaluated, how long before the CPSE meets?**

Once the school district's special education office receives the completed and signed "consent to evaluate" form, the evaluation can occur. Then the CPSE is required to meet, determine if your child is eligible for services and make and then provide their recommendations to the districts's school board within thirty days of receiving your signed consent to evaluate. Some Committees meet monthly or on an "as needed" basis. The Committee does not schedule a meeting for your child until the evaluator sends the evaluation report and medical records to the Chairperson.

### **You, the parent, control the 60-day timeline by doing the following:**

- Mailing the completed and signed "consent to evaluate" form to the Chairperson A.S.A.P.;
- Arriving at the evaluation at the scheduled time (rescheduling evaluations makes it difficult to follow the 60-day timeline);
- Notifying the chairperson and evaluator if you have moved or your phone number changes;
- Getting copies of your child's recent physical examinations and immunization records and giving them to the evaluator on the day of your evaluation;
- Arriving at the scheduled CPSE meeting at the scheduled time (no show may mean a rescheduled CPSE meeting which makes it difficult to follow the 60-day timeline);
- Promptly signing the "consent for services" that the CPSE has recommended on the IEP.

## **14. What if I change my mind after I request the referral packet or start the evaluation process?**

It is important to remember that this process is voluntary. Children ages three to five are not legally required to attend school. Parents have the right to refuse a referral to preschool special education. The CPSE chairperson is available to answer any questions you have about the process to help you with your decision. If you choose to stop the process at any time, please call the Chairperson A.S.A.P. to inform them of your decision. You may be asked to put your request in writing to the CPSE. If you have selected an evaluating agency, please call them also to inform them of your decision to stop the process.

**15. Should I bring my child to the CPSE meeting?**

This is your choice. You will be an active participant in the meeting. If watching your child makes this difficult for you, you may choose not to bring your child. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide babysitting service if you bring your child. If you do bring your child, feel free to bring quiet toys for your child to play with at the meeting. If you do not bring your child, you are also welcome to bring your child's picture so we can "meet" your child.

**16. Can I bring someone with me to the CPSE meeting?**

Yes, you can bring anyone you wish to the CPSE meeting.

**17. What will happen at the CPSE meeting?**

- You and a representative from the evaluation team will discuss your child's strengths and needs;
- As a team, the Committee on Preschool Education will determine if your child is eligible to receive services by meeting the criteria of a "preschool child with a disability";
- If your child is eligible, the Committee will discuss the appropriate level of services and the process for selecting providers to deliver the approved services;
- An Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be written up which specifies the special education programs and services to be provided to meet the educational needs of your child.

**18. How long is the CPSE meeting?**

This varies depending on the purpose of the CPSE meeting. For initial evaluations, the CPSE typically meets for 20 minutes. Meetings to review or amend the IEP may take 5 to 30 minutes. This is a good question to ask at the start of the CPSE so you will know how long your child's meeting is scheduled. The CPSE Committee may have other meetings scheduled after your child's meeting.

**19. How can I prepare for my child's CPSE meeting?**

It is important that you have read the evaluation reports. The Chairperson or the evaluator should have mailed these to you prior to the meeting. Additionally, the evaluator should have discussed the evaluation results with you after your child was evaluated. If this did not happen, or if there are things that you do not understand about the evaluation results, please ask questions at the meeting. You may wish to write down questions before the meeting. Bringing paper and pen is helpful so you can take notes.

**20. Who do I contact after the meeting if I still have questions?**

The Chairperson serves as the link to the CPSE and serves as a resource to you during the process. Make sure you have the Chairperson's name and number.

**21. How does the CPSE determine if my child is eligible for preschool special education services?**

This is the first decision that the CPSE needs to make after reviewing the evaluations. Eligibility as a preschool student with a disability is based on the results of an individual evaluation of your child (not dependent on using one single evaluation tool). State Education regulations state "to be identified as having a disability, a preschool student shall have a significant delay or disorder in one or more functional areas related to cognitive, language and communication, adaptive, socio-emotional or motor development which adversely affects the student's ability to learn."

**The delay of disorder must be documented by the results of the evaluation and indicate:**

- A 12-month delay in one or more functional areas listed above; OR;
- A 33 percent delay in one functional area, or a 25 percent delay in each of two functional area; OR
- If standardized assessments are used, a score of 2.0 standard deviations below the mean in one functional area, or a score of 1.5 standard deviation in each of two functional areas.

**22. What does it mean to have my child labeled “preschool child with a disability?”**

Putting a label on a child is not an easy thing to do in education. The CPSE is very sensitive to this issue. However, there needs to be a way of identifying which children are eligible for special services. Beginning July 1, 1993, the New York State Education Department developed criteria to decide how preschool children are eligible for services. All children in New York State who meet the state criteria have the label of “preschool student with a disability.” This label identifies that your child is eligible for services under CPSE , that is all.

**23. If the evaluation team recommends services for my child does this automatically mean my child is eligible to receive services?**

No, the CPSE determines eligibility for services and the type of services appropriate to meet the educational needs of your child. Evaluating agencies have the choice to include or not to include recommendations in the evaluation reports. **It is important for you to remember that these are recommendations ONLY.**

**The CPSE does not encourage you to “shop around” for services before a CPSE meeting.** The CPSE determines eligibility and the appropriate level of services. According the New York State Education Department guidelines, the CPSE **must** consider and recommend the “least restrictive services” for your child. “Shopping around” can be a disappointing experience if the CPSE does not approve the service you are exploring.

**24. My child’s doctor is recommending services for my child. Does this automatically mean my child is eligible to receive services under the CPSE?**

No, the CPSE determines eligibility for services and the type of services appropriate to meet the educational needs of your child. Many doctors submit reports to the CPSE to be included in the decision making process of determining eligibility and appropriate level of services. **It is important for you to remember that these are recommendations ONLY.**

**25. What happens if my child is found ineligible for services?**

If the CPSE determines that your child does not meet the criteria as a “preschool student with a disability” and is not eligible for services, the following may occur:

- no further action is taken by the CPSE;
- the CPSE may recommend that you return for a re-evaluation after several months (if you still have concerns about your child)

Refer to question #32 for further detail.

**26. How does the CPSE determine what services my child needs?**

This is the second decision the CPSE makes if your child meets the criteria of a “preschool student with a disability”. This decision is guided by the principle, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that the placement of a student with a disability will:

- provide the type of special education services the student needs;
- provide for the education of the student to the maximum extent appropriate with other students who do not have disabilities; and
- be as close as possible to the student’s home.

When deciding services according to the Least Restrictive Environment Policy, the CPSE must consider the appropriateness of services ranging from least restrictive to most restrictive. It is sometimes easier to think of these options on a continuum:

### **Least to Most Restrictive**

- related services only
- Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) services only
- Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) services and related services
- Integrated Class, ½ day (children with disabilities and community children)
- Integrated Class, full day (children with disabilities and community children)
- Segregated Class, ½ day (only children with disabilities)
- Segregated Class, full day (only children with disabilities)

The Least Restrictive Environment Policy emphasizes that students with disabilities may be removed from the regular educational environment ONLY when the nature or severity of the disability is such that even without the use of supplementary aids or services, education can not be satisfactorily achieved. So, if your child is attending a nursery school, day care, Headstart, or Pre-K class, the CPSE will first consider the appropriateness of providing services in this least restrictive setting.

### **27. Where can my child receive services?**

If your child is attending a nursery school, day care, Headstart, or Pre-K class, the CPSE may consider having services delivered in this setting. Examples of services coming into your home, day care, or classroom may be the following: Special Education Teacher (referred to as SEIT), Speech Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, and/or Counselor.

The CPSE may decide that services should be delivered in an integrated or segregated class setting. Generally, these special education classes meet Monday through Friday from 8:30 – 1:30. They are taught by a special education teacher, teacher's assistants, and aides. The classes have between 8-18 students depending on the type of class. Classes are either integrated (a mixture of children with various disabilities attend the class with typically developing community children) or segregated (all of the children in the classroom have a disability). If your child is recommended to attend a special education class, transportation for your child to attend the class will also be provided.

### **28. How often does the CPSE meet if my child receives services?**

If your child is eligible to receive services after the initial meeting, the CPSE is required to meet at least one time per year. This is referred to as the annual review. The annual review meeting is held in the Spring before services end for the year. The purpose of the annual review is to review the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This review will consider the educational progress and achievement made by your child and his/her ability to participate in regular education. The CPSE will determine if your child continues to meet the criteria of a "preschool student with a disability" and determine the appropriate level of services for the following year.

The CPSE will continue to meet one time per year until your child enters kindergarten. The CPSE is available to meet more frequently if needed.

### **29. How long will my child receive services?**

Preschool services follow the school calendar. Services are provided following the 10-month school year (September through June) or the 12-month school year (includes July and August). No services are provided during school breaks (Thanksgiving vacation, Christmas vacation, Spring break) or national Holidays. If your child is eligible for services their IEP will cover the 10 month school year.

The New York State Education Department has specific criteria for students to be eligible for 12 month services. The criteria is based on severity of delay and substantial regression. The eligibility for summer services can be discussed at your child's annual review meeting.

**30. What do I do if I do not agree with the recommendations made at my child's CPSE meeting?**

You as a parent, have several options. You may wish to ask for a second CPSE meeting and bring other people working with your child to this meeting who could not make the first (i.e. nursery school teacher, baby-sitter). You may wish or the CPSE may offer a second evaluation to occur in a few months to see how your child is developing. If you still disagree with the CPSE decision, mediation is an option that the CPSE is required to offer to you. You may choose to skip the mediation option and start an impartial hearing – you, the parent, are still required to meet with the neutral party to have the process of mediation explained.

**Remember that the CPSE is encouraged to operate on a consensus building philosophy. We do have State mandated that guide our decisions, but our goal is to work collaboratively with you during this process.**

**31. My child received services under the Early Intervention Program. Does this automatically mean my child is eligible for services under the CPSE?**

No, your child is not automatically eligible for service under the CPSE because he/she received Early Intervention Services. The Early Intervention (EI) system is more focused on the child developmentally and in relation to the family. The Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) is more focused on the educational needs of the child (help the child prepare for kindergarten). When a child transitions from EI to CPSE, it is the responsibility of the CPSE to determine eligibility, placement, and services.

**32. What happens when my child transitions to kindergarten? Will they still have the label "preschool student with a disability?"**

The New York State Education Department has developed criteria for school-age students which is different from the criteria for preschool students. The School-age decision making committee is called the Committee on Special Education (CSE). When your child is ready to transition, the CSE will meet prior to your child entering kindergarten. The CSE will first determine if your child is eligible to receive school-age special services.

Many preschool students with disabilities enter kindergarten without needing school-age special services. Their preschool records are then considered closed. With your written consent, the records can be opened to staff working with your child.

**33. What Federal and State regulations does the CPSE follow?**

- First, the CPSE follows the Federal education regulations: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
- Second, the CPSE follows the New York State Education Law which interprets Federal regulation. Section 4410 of the Education Law, Article 89, is specific to preschool students with disabilities;
- Third, the CPSE follows Part 200 Regulation of the New York State Commissioner of Education.