

Widening the Circle

Celebrating Neurodiversity in Faith Based Schools

Focus Strategy: The Child Find Process:

What Schools Need to Know

Under the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the public school where the private school resides is obligated to provide equitable services to any child who is in need of special education or related services. The public school, or Local Education Agency (LEA) is responsible for the process of “identifying, locating, and evaluating” students. **This is called “Child Find.”**

Steps to the Child Find process:

- When a private school student is suspected of having a disability, the parent contacts the LEA to request an evaluation.
- The LEA has 15 business days to respond to this request.
- The LEA, **in partnership with the parent and private school**, will collect data to determine if a disability exists.

This data could include:

- Attendance
 - Grades/ Report Cards
 - Developmental history
 - Teacher input
 - Standardized test scores, Universal Screeners, Progress Monitoring data
 - Previous evaluations (current or expired)
- An LEA representative will coordinate a Review of Existing Data (RED) meeting with the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET). The MET consists of parents or a surrogate of the child, General Education Teacher, Special Education Teacher, Interpreter of Data, and an LEA representative. Parents can invite other participants, including the current teacher(s) at the private school.
 - At the RED meeting, the team will decide if enough data exists to determine if the child is eligible for special education. If enough data exists, the team determines eligibility or ineligibility for special education. If there is not enough data, the parent consents in writing to have additional data collected. The LEA assesses students in all areas of suspected disability to obtain the data/ information necessary to make a decision. This can include assessment of cognitive, academic, behavioral, adaptive, emotional, sensory, speech and language, and/or motor skills.
 - After consent is obtained, the LEA has 60 days to collect the data and determine eligibility. Evaluators can come to the private school or parents can bring the child to the LEA for testing and data collection.

Once data is collected, the LEA will convene a MET meeting. The team reviews the information to determine if the child meets eligibility requirements. Eligibility is based on 3 factors:

- **The child meets one or more of the 13 categories of special education described in IDEA**
- **The disability impacts access to the general curriculum**
- **The child requires specially designed instruction to access the general curriculum**

If the child is found eligible for special education services and the team agrees to the findings, parents have the right to enroll their child in the LEA and develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

- If enrollment in the LEA is declined, the child is not eligible for the same services as students in the public school. Students may be eligible for an ***Individual Service Plan (ISP)*** for services determined at the consultation meeting.

The private school representative and parent are advised to advocate on behalf of direct and indirect services based on the needs identified in the evaluation.



Supporting Parents Through the Child Find Process

Private school representatives are often more knowledgeable about the Child Find process than parents. The private school can partner with the parents through the process to best support the child.

Coaching: At the initial stage of the Child Find process, the private school can coach the parent on how to reach out to the LEA by providing contact information. If parents need more support, the private school can provide the appropriate language to use and even a template for the email.

Guidance: The private school can provide resources and guidance to the parents regarding IDEA regulations. One resource would be a guide of what to expect at the LEA meetings. Sharing this knowledge will empower parents to understand their rights under federal law. The private school can guide the parents to make decisions that are in the best interest of their child.

Support: The Child Find Process can be overwhelming and intimidating. Private school personnel should accompany the parents to meetings and support them to advocate for their child. They may need test scores interpreted or a better understanding of what the LEA can offer.

Managing expectations: Under IDEA, private school students are afforded less services than public school students. Private schools can help parents understand what their child is and is not entitled to under the law.

Parent Connection:

Parents have rights when they place their students in private schools, however they are not equal to those to children in the public schools. Navigating the law is easier when accompanied by a knowledgeable advocate who is aware of what the private school can provide and necessary services that will support the student's educational goals.

Working in partnership, frequent communication, and transparency are key!

Federal Resource:

[Questions and Answers on Serving Students with Disabilities in Private Schools](#)

