

just the **FAQs**

answers to frequently asked questions

Chesterfield County
Public Schools

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Special education

What is special education?

Special education provides instruction and support for young people 2 to 21 years old who have a mental, physical or emotional disability. Special education is sometimes called exceptional education.

What is new in special education?

Chesterfield County Public Schools is among the school systems across the country that have begun to re-think special education. Chesterfield educators believe the school system has a moral imperative to raise the bar for all students, close achievement gaps, treat everyone ethically and work for the success of all children. Using a spectrum of inclusion tailored to the needs of each student, principals and teachers have increased their expectations of what special education students can and should accomplish. The results have been significant gains in academic performance, which moves Chesterfield County Public Schools closer to achieving its top goal of academic excellence for all students.

Throughout the school year, the school system holds professional development sessions for general and special education teachers on ways to expand inclusion, differentiate classroom instruction, co-teach effectively and work in partnership with parents.

How does Chesterfield compare to other Virginia school systems when it comes to inclusion?

Chesterfield County Public Schools has great success with inclusion. Most special education students in Chesterfield receive special education services in general education classes with age-level peers in the school the student is zoned to attend.

According to 2006-07 data from the Virginia Department of Education, a greater percentage of students in Chesterfield County Public Schools receive services in general education classes than

almost every other large school system in Virginia. Chesterfield ranks second to Loudoun County, with Chesterfield enrolling 59.2 percent of special education students in general education classes at least 80 percent of the day.

Will Chesterfield continue to include special education students in general education classes whenever possible?

Yes. The school system's goal remains steady: Place students with a disability in the least restrictive environment possible so that they progress and experience success.

Does Chesterfield plan to do away with special education classes?

No. Inclusion in general education classes works for many but is not appropriate for every student with a disability. Using the spectrum of inclusion, Chesterfield County Public Schools will continue to offer special education classes and general education classes and make sure the needs of each student are met in the least restrictive environment.

Define least restrictive environment.

Least restrictive environment means that each student's needs are analyzed. If the child can succeed in a general education classroom, then that is the least restrictive environment for that child. For another student, the least restrictive environment might

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be a combination of general instruction and special instruction.

Define spectrum of inclusion.

Spectrum of inclusion means that many learning environments are available for a student with a disability. Moving from the least restrictive environment to the most restrictive environment, here is the spectrum of inclusion:

- ▶ general education class with no supports
- ▶ general education class with teacher consulting with special education teacher
- ▶ general education class with special education instructional assistant
- ▶ general education class that is co-taught with special education teacher
- ▶ general education class for electives or resource periods
- ▶ general education during lunch, recess and activities
- ▶ special education class

It is rare for Chesterfield students to be transferred to another public school for specialized services or enrolled in a private school because the school system offers such comprehensive special education services.

Why can't a child with a disability be placed totally in general education classes if that is what parents want?

Opportunities to participate in general education classes must focus on achievement outcomes of special education students, while honoring the social benefits that come from having students with disabilities and without disabilities in the same class. If being in general education classes is best for the student, then that is where the student will be placed. If a combination of general education and special education environments is what is best for the student, then that is where the student will be placed. A one-size-fits-all least restrictive environment does not exist.

Who makes the decision about what is best for each student?

A team develops each student's Individualized Education Plan. An IEP team includes the student's parents, general education teacher, special education teacher, school administrator and other professionals as needed. The IEP team meets at least once each year to review the student's performance and determine which special education supports and services the student needs. The team determines how the student will access the general education curriculum and

decides about placement based on those needs in the least restrictive environment. The team emphasizes participation with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible.

What happens when members of the IEP team disagree on what is best?

There are, unfortunately, times when team members disagree. Every effort is made to resolve the situation at the IEP meeting. Administrators, teachers and parents are encouraged to respectfully listen to all concerns and work together to find an agreeable outcome. It may be necessary to gather more information and meet again. If there is disagreement over the best placement for the student, then the team works to find consensus.

What is the role of parents who have children in special education?

All parents are advocates for their children. Communication among parents, teachers and school leaders is essential to making sure that each student succeeds.

Parents of children in special education participate on the team that writes the Individualized Education Plan, which is revisited each year. If parents disagree with the plan or believe that it is not working, then they may request a meeting of the IEP team to discuss their concerns and review the plan to determine if revisions are appropriate.

Parents who have questions about special education procedures are encouraged to contact the principal or the special education administrator for their child's school. The Parent-Teacher Resource Center is an excellent resource for parents of students with disabilities. Located in the Fulghum Center at 4003 Cogbill Road, the center's phone number is 743-3703.

Parents who have children in special education are also encouraged to attend meetings of the school system's Special Education Advisory Committee. For the past three years, the committee has sponsored Special Education Student Success Day for parents of students with a disability and for middle and high school students who receive special education services. For more information, call 594-1732.

For more information

Contact the Office of Exceptional Education at 594-1732 or go online to chesterfield.k12.va.us.

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