

# Is Your Child Having Problems in School?

## A Parent's Guide to Special Education Services in Bridgeport



As a parent or guardian, you are an important part of your child's special education program

### If your child is having trouble learning, he or she may be eligible for extra help through special education services.

Special education is for students with limitations that keep them from learning in school. Some things that may qualify a student for special education services are ADHD, depression, anxiety, learning disabilities, emotional issues, or physical limitations.

If your child qualifies for special education services, a special plan will be developed to help your child learn. The plan may include additional help in the classroom, programs, special classes, or whatever else your child needs to learn. If your child is eligible, there will be no cost for these services. Transportation must be provided so your child can receive the services he or she needs.

As a parent or guardian, you are an important part of your child's special education program. Just as your child has a right to services, you have a right to understand the special education process. You need to be a strong advocate for your child's education.

## Steps to Getting Special Education Services for Your Child



### STEP 1 PPT Meeting is Requested

If your child is having difficulty at school, you can request that your child be evaluated to determine why he or she is having trouble, and to determine if he or she qualifies for special education services. To have your child evaluated, you need to ask the school for a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting. To ask for a PPT meeting:

- ✓ Write a letter addressed to the principal of your school. (Be sure to include the date.)
- ✓ Deliver the letter to the school secretary. (The school **MUST** accept the letter.)
- ✓ Ask the secretary to stamp the letter to record exactly when it was received.
- ✓ Ask the secretary to make you a copy of the stamped letter.
- ✓ Start a folder/envelope for your records. Keep this letter with those records.

After you submit your written request, the school must set up the first PPT meeting within a “reasonable amount of time.” The school must notify you of the date and time of the meeting at least **five** days before the meeting. Your child’s PPT process may require more than one meeting. You should plan to attend **ALL** of the meetings. If you cannot attend a meeting, ask the school to reschedule it. Keep in mind that the school is required to work with your schedule when deciding the date and time of this meeting.

**IMPORTANT:** A teacher or another school staff person can also request a PPT meeting for your child. When this happens, you will receive a letter from the school within five days of the teacher’s request. Keep this letter for your records.

## Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)

At the first Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting, you may discuss special methods to help your child learn called Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI). Some examples of SRBI include trying a different teaching strategy, providing special tutoring, and suggesting steps parents can try at home. The time it takes to start the SRBI strategies varies. Some students may already be receiving this help. Other students may start receiving help after the PPT meeting and may be tested to determine which SRBI methods would be most effective. For some children, SRBI may help them succeed in the classroom and they will not need other services. However, if your child truly needs special education services, SRBI are not a replacement for special education and you should continue to request that your child be evaluated.

### STEP 2 First PPT Meeting is Held

At the first Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting, you and the school staff members will talk about what problems your child is having, if your child requires evaluations, what evaluations your child requires, who will conduct the evaluations, and when they will take place. It is important that you share any concerns and information you have about your child at the meeting. The school will assign a special education teacher to act as your child's "special education case manager" and coordinate the PPT process.

At that first PPT meeting, ask to see the results of your child's evaluation before the next PPT meeting so you have time to ask questions and understand the findings. Tell the special education case manager that you want to review the results with each person who did an evaluation of your child. If you ask for the results of the evaluation, the school must send them to you at least **three** days before the next PPT meeting.

**IMPORTANT: If you want your child to be evaluated for special education services before the SRBI methods are tried, you can ask at the PPT meeting. Even if the school tells you that they must try SRBI before evaluating your child for special education services, be persistent in your request. They do not have to do SRBI before evaluations. If you are told that the evaluations cannot be done, ask that the denial be written in the PPT minutes. You will then have a record of the refusal.**

There will be a number of people at each PPT meeting. These people must include:

- ✓ You
- ✓ Your child, if you want him or her there for all or part of the meeting
- ✓ Any other person you would like to bring to the meeting
- ✓ A regular education teacher
- ✓ A special education teacher
- ✓ An administrator
- ✓ The school psychologist
- ✓ The school guidance counselor
- ✓ An individual who knows the curriculum and can make recommendations about how to assign resources and services (usually an administrator)

### **PPT minutes**

At each PPT meeting, minutes will be taken. PPT minutes are a legal record of the recommendations made during a PPT meeting by all of the PPT members together (including you). They are very important because they help you follow your child's progress. The following must be included in the PPT minutes:

- ✓ If the school refuses to evaluate your child
- ✓ If the school refuses to evaluate your child before or while your child is also receiving SRBI
- ✓ If at the PPT meeting, you request to see the results of the evaluation
- ✓ Any concerns you have about your child's learning

You should review the minutes when you get them to make sure they are correct and complete. Keep a copy with your records. If you disagree with the minutes, you need to let the special education case manager know in writing within five days of getting the minutes.

## **STEP 3 Your Child is Evaluated**

There are many reasons why a child may be having difficulty learning and should be evaluated for special education services. Some examples of signs that your child should be evaluated include:

- ✓ Behavioral problems
- ✓ Your child is not making progress in school (Note: Progress does not just mean getting better grades. Each year, your child should progress and mature socially and emotionally, as well as academically.)
- ✓ Your child is missing a lot of school (This may be an indication that your child is having learning or behavioral issues in the classroom.)

There are different ways to try to find out what is going on with your child. The types of evaluations the school will conduct will depend on your child's needs. You **MUST** give your written permission before the school can start evaluating your child.

### **Examples of the kinds of evaluations that may be done include:**

- ✓ Tests to check academic achievement and grade level
- ✓ Tests to learn how your child's brain processes information and learns
- ✓ Tests to check your child's speech, language, and hearing
- ✓ Tests to check for any physical limitations
- ✓ Tests to evaluate social and/or emotional development

You can request a copy of your child's evaluation results in writing if you forgot to ask for them at the first PPT meeting. You should also ask to review the results with each evaluator before the next PPT meeting. To do this, send a letter to the special education case manager. Make sure the letter is dated, and keep a copy for your records. You must receive the evaluation results at least three days before the next PPT meeting.

**IMPORTANT:** If you disagree with the types of evaluations the school conducts or the results of the evaluation, you have the right to have your child evaluated by someone who does not work for the school district. To do this, send a written request for an outside evaluation to the Executive Director of Specialized Instruction for Bridgeport Public Schools. Keep a copy of this letter with your records. If the district refuses, you can file for a “due process” hearing. See “Special Situations” on page 7 for more about information about due process hearings.

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**STEP 4  
Second  
PPT Meeting  
is Held**

After your child has been evaluated, the school will schedule a follow-up PPT meeting. You should attend this meeting. At this meeting, the school staff will review the results of your child’s evaluation. Based on the evaluation, both you and the school staff will decide together whether or not your child is eligible for special education services.

**If your child IS found eligible for services,** an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be created. You should receive a copy of the IEP no more than **five** days after the second PPT meeting. Please see “Important questions to ask about your child’s IEP” on page 6 for a list of questions to ask. Be sure to contact your child’s special education case manager if you have any questions after this PPT meeting.

**If your child IS NOT found eligible for services** and you disagree with the evaluation, you can request a “due process” hearing. See “Special Situations” on page 7 for more information on due process hearings.

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**STEP 5  
IEP is  
Created and  
Implemented**

Your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) should address his or her learning, behavioral, and/or social needs. It should clearly state what services your child will receive, how often he or she will receive them, where they will be delivered (for example, in your child’s classroom, in a resource room, or in another school in the district), what staff people will be responsible for the services, and when the services will begin and end. The IEP will also state explicit goals for your child’s learning and behavior. Special education services might include speech, occupational and/or physical therapy, psychological counseling, or special help with reading or math.

**IMPORTANT:** The school must complete your child’s evaluation, develop the IEP, and implement it within 45 school days from the date of the written referral for evaluation. It will take longer only if it takes extra time to get your approval for the evaluation. If your child is being placed in a therapeutic school out of your school district, the placement must be made within 60 school days after the second PPT meeting.

### **Important questions to ask about your child's IEP:**

- ✓ What does my child need in the classroom to learn better?
- ✓ What grade level is my child? How did you decide that?
- ✓ What should I expect my child to be able to accomplish by the end of the school year?
- ✓ How will I know if my child is making progress?
- ✓ Does my child need special help when taking tests?
- ✓ Will my child take standardized tests (like the Connecticut Mastery Test)? If so, will he or she receive special help? If not, why?
- ✓ Will my child participate in classes and other activities with students who are not in special education?
- ✓ How will you determine whether or not my child feels included at school?

## **STEP 6 Your Child's Progress is Tracked**

Once your child has an IEP and is receiving special education services, the school must hold at least one PPT meeting each school year to review your child's progress. You or the school may want to make changes to the IEP depending on how your child is doing. Changes may include what services your child receives, how often they happen, and where the services are given. A PPT meeting must be held before any changes are made to your child's IEP. You must approve all changes in writing.

**IMPORTANT:** You can ask for a PPT meeting at ANY time if you feel your child's needs are not being met, if your child is not making adequate progress on the goals stated in the IEP, or if you do not think the placement is working.

The school should also re-evaluate your child for services at least once every three years. However, if you feel your child is not making progress, you can request that your child be re-evaluated at ANY time.

### **As a parent or guardian you have a right to:**

#### **PPT Meetings**

- ✓ Request a PPT meeting at any time if you think your child's IEP should be changed. You should always make your request in writing and keep a copy for your records.
- ✓ Attend all PPT meetings. If you cannot be there in person, participate by phone.
- ✓ Bring another person with you to the PPT meeting.
- ✓ Ask for a copy of the PPT minutes, including recommendations, actions that have been approved and/or refused, and your concerns.
- ✓ Request a translator for the PPT meetings.
- ✓ Audio record PPT meetings.
- ✓ Ask to see some samples of your child's work.

#### **Evaluations**

- ✓ Receive information about how your child is being evaluated, including what tests are being used, why these tests were chosen, and what the results mean.
- ✓ Have your child evaluated by someone outside the school district if you disagree with the results of the school's evaluation.

## **IEPs**

- ✓ Ask as many questions as you need to understand your child's IEP.
- ✓ Ask for the time you need to review the IEP before you approve it.

At any time, you can submit a written request for a copy of your child's school records. The school should send them to you within 10 days of receiving the request. You may receive one free copy of your child's records during his or her years as a student in the school district.

## **Special Situations: What If...**

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### **What if you ask for a PPT meeting, but the school does not schedule it?**

**(For example, the school says it is too late in the year.)** Be polite and persistent. Make sure you make your requests in writing and follow up with phone calls. Also, talk to your child's teacher. If the school still does not schedule the meeting, call, write, or email any of the following people: the school principal, the Bridgeport Special Education Ombudsperson, or the Executive Director of Specialized Instruction. (You can also get advice from one of the resource organizations listed on page 8.)

**What if you disagree with the way your child was evaluated, the evaluation results, or the IEP?** You have a right to question decisions made by the school district. If you disagree with the evaluation or the kinds of services offered to your child (including where your child receives services), you can request a "due process" hearing.

To request a due process hearing, contact the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education. After you fill out a form to officially request the hearing, the State Department of Education will appoint a hearing officer and schedule the hearing. The hearing must take place and a decision must be made within 45 calendar days of your written request.

You may want to hire a lawyer to help you with the due process hearing. You can contact the State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, for more information on using legal services.

### **NOTE**

- ✓ Either the parent or the district can ask to postpone a due process hearing. (The postponement may or may not be granted.)
- ✓ You can request that the hearing be held somewhere other than at your child's school.
- ✓ Only things already discussed at a PPT meeting can be reviewed at the hearing.
- ✓ The school district will pay for some or all of your legal fees if the hearing officer agrees with the parent.

**IMPORTANT: Mediation is always another option. Mediation is an informal meeting process in which you and the school district try to reach a compromise with the help of a mediator. The mediator is appointed by the State Department of Education.**

If your child is eligible for special education services, he or she **MUST** receive them—it's the law.

If your child is eligible for special education services, he or she **MUST** receive them—it's the law. Also, the law requires that these services must be provided in the "least restrictive environment." This means that students with special needs must be in regular classes with other children whenever possible, provided that they continue to make progress.

### Be a strong advocate for your child's education!

- ✓ **Be polite, assertive, and persistent!**
- ✓ **Keep good records!** Make sure you keep copies of all documents regarding your child's special education services, including requests for PPT meetings, PPT meeting minutes, PPT meeting recommendations, IEPs, etc.
- ✓ **Ask questions!** If you don't understand something discussed in a PPT meeting or in your child's IEP, ask for an explanation. Keep asking until you understand.
- ✓ **Check in!** At the annual PPT meeting, ask how your child is doing compared to the beginning of the school year. Ask to see samples of your child's work. The schoolwork shows you what your child has done during the year. There should be progress. If your child has made very little progress, ask why.

### Get help!

If you have questions or concerns about your child's special education services, contact any of these resources:

- ✓ Bridgeport School District Special Education Ombudsperson: 203-275-1753
- ✓ Center for Children's Advocacy: 203-223-8975 or [www.kidscounsel.org](http://www.kidscounsel.org)
- ✓ Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center: 1-800-445-2722 or [www.cpacinc.org](http://www.cpacinc.org)
- ✓ Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education: 860-713-6910 or [www.sde.ct.gov](http://www.sde.ct.gov)
- ✓ State Education Resource Center (SERC): 860-632-1485 or [www.ctserc.org](http://www.ctserc.org)
- ✓ NOTE: If your child is assigned to a Probation Officer, you can ask the officer to refer you to "Educational Support Services," which will provide you with an educational attorney for your child.



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[www.bcacct.org](http://www.bcacct.org)

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