

# Understanding Special Education: An Introduction



*Kathleen Donovan and Gina Piccolini DeSalvo,*  
Coordinators  
Special Education Parent Resource Center



## Specially Designed Instruction

## A Brief History

### What is Special Education?

- specially designed instruction
- at no cost to the parent
- to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability

*Special education is  
a service, not a  
place.*



**6  
Principals  
of IDEA**

**Cornerstones  
of  
Special  
Education**

## **A Brief History of Special Education**

- Public Law (PL) 94-142

- **Individuals with  
Disabilities Education  
Act (IDEA)**





## 6 Principles of IDEA

1. All children will be served. (*Virginia serves children aged 2 through 21*)
2. Children will be tested fairly to determine if they will receive services
3. Schools have a duty to provide individually designed, appropriate programs for every child at no cost to their parents

**...continued**

*From Navigating the  
Special Education Maze,  
4th Ed.*


## 6 Principles of IDEA

4. Children with disabilities will be educated with children who do not have disabilities whenever possible in the "**least restrictive environment**" (LRE)
5. The decisions of the school system can be challenged by the parents
6. Parents of children with disabilities participate in the planning and decision-making for their child's education



*One of IDEA's foundational principles is the right of parents to participate in educational decision making.*

*From Navigating the  
Special Education Maze,  
4th Ed.*



Cornerstones of  
Special Education

**All Children Can Learn**

and have a right to receive a  
**Free and Appropriate Public  
Education (FAPE)**

In the **Least Restrictive  
Environment (LRE)**

## Specially Designed Instruction

adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child:

- the content
- methodology
- delivery of instruction



**Addressing the unique  
needs of the child  
resulting from the  
disability**



**Ensuring Access  
to the General  
Curriculum**



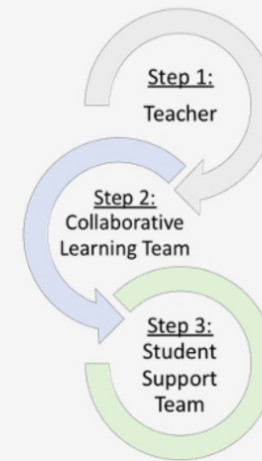
**To Meet Educational  
Standards that Apply  
to All Children**

Within the jurisdiction of the local  
education agency



### Student Support Process Overview

## Arlington Public Schools Student Support Process



Student Support Process Overview

Student Support Team Manual





**Phases of  
Student Support  
Process**

**Why the  
Student  
Support  
Process**

**Student  
Support  
Teams**

**Student  
Support  
Process  
Overview**

Provides support and guidance for staff and families

Ensures consistent implementation of practices and processes across all schools and levels

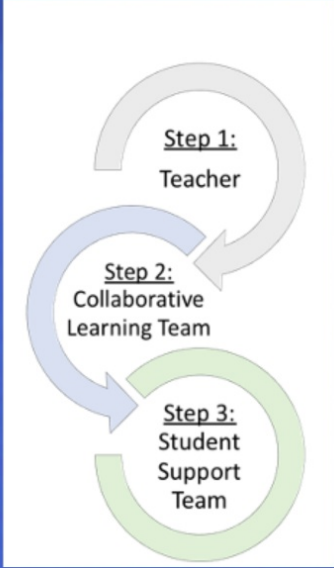
Reduces time staff are pulled away from instruction & services

Aligns, strengthens & streamlines processes

## Why the Student Support Process?

Consolidation of three processes:

- ATSS Framework
- Special Education
- Section 504



**Phase 1:** Indication of need/teacher differentiates and provides supports

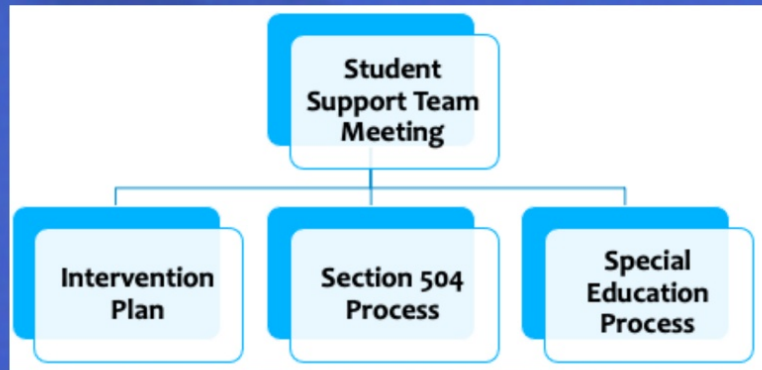
**Phase 2:** Consult w/ CLT - notify families; provide support/ interventions

**Phase 3:** Referral to Student Support Team

## Phases of the Student Support Process



# Referral to a Student Support Team



**The Student Support Team is an interdisciplinary team that can:**

- Create an intensified intervention plan
- Recommend an evaluation for special education
- Consider eligibility for Section 504

**SST  
Members**



*Parents can refer to a Student Support Team at any time*





### **Other Possible Members**

### **Mandated SST Members:**

- Parent (phone/virtual/in-person)
- Classroom Teacher who has knowledge of the student
- Special Education Teacher
- Administrator/LEA
- School Psychologist
- Social Worker
- Coordinator (SPED/504)
- Nurse
- School Counselor (MS/HS)

## **Other Optional Staff: (Based on Referral Info)**

- Content Expert (Academic or SEL/Behavior)
- SLP/OT/PT
- Hearing/Vision Specialist
- School Counselor (Elementary)
- ELL Teacher
- Resource Teacher for Gifted
- Interpreter
- Substance Abuse Counselor
- Equity and Excellence Coordinator

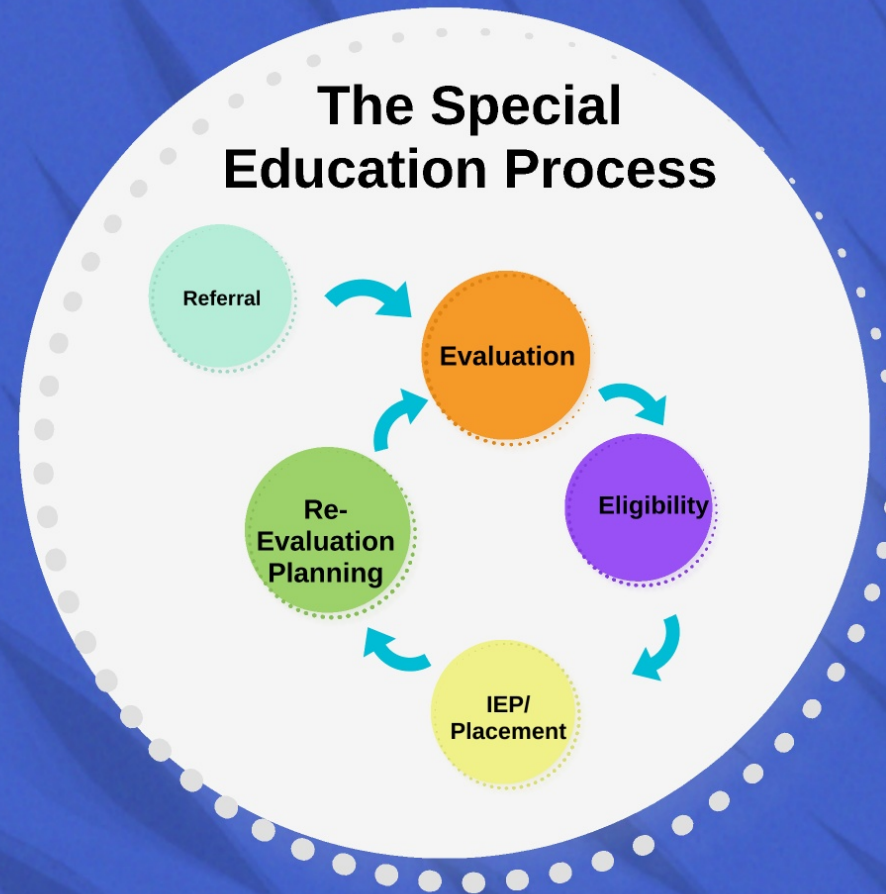


*Parents (and the school district) may invite other individuals who "have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child".*



## Timelines

- **Student Support Team** meetings are convened within **10 administrative days** of referral
- **Evaluations** must be completed and eligibility meetings held within **60 administrative days**
- **IEP meetings** must be held within **30 calendar days** of a student being found eligible
- **IEP meetings** must be held at least **once per year**
- **Reevaluation** meetings must occur **every 3 years**





## Referral to Special Education

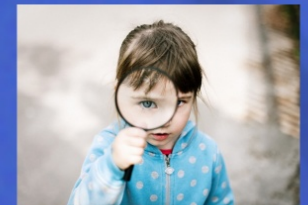
Once a referral is received, APS will schedule a Student Support Team (SST) meeting to discuss the referral within 10 administrative days.

Parents must be invited to the meeting, but attendance is not required.

A decision will be made as a team whether to refer for an evaluation.



*Parental consent is required to evaluate*





Anyone who suspects that a child may have a disability may refer a child, including parents.

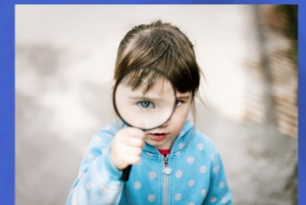
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## Referral to Special Education



## Speech Only Evaluation

- Speech and language evaluation
- Teacher Narrative
- Observation
- Vision & Hearing Screening

## Full Study

- Social History
- Psychological
- Educational
- Teacher Narrative
- Hearing and Vision

*Other (Pending Needs): Speech/Language, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Medical, etc.*

***What types of evaluations are typically completed?***

**Parent Narrative**

**Evaluation Expectations**

Consider providing a **parent narrative**.

Providing a parent narrative is a great way to add your perspective and any pertinent information to the committee discussion and considerations.

Information the parent provides can help the team:

- Know how the child is functioning at home
- Document strengths and concerns
- Highlight strategies that may have worked (or not worked) in the home setting that are relevant to school.



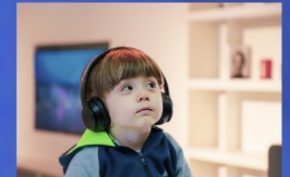
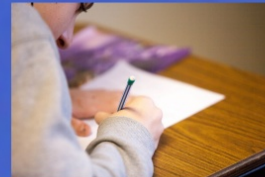
## Parent Narrative



- *Evaluations are completed in all suspected areas of disability.*
- *Evaluations must be completed in 65 administrative days*
- ***Evaluation "Packet" is available to parents at least two days prior to the meeting.***
- *All information, including information submitted by families such as parent narratives and reports from private clinicians, is considered.*

## Evaluation Expectations

Evaluation Disagreements



- If a family disagrees with an evaluation given during a child's evaluation process, the family has the right to have an IEE conducted by a qualified person who does not work for the school
- A family may request one IEE for each evaluation given during the current evaluation process
- Upon request for an IEE, the school division will provide a family with information about available sources for obtaining an IEE from a qualified examiner
- The IEE is conducted at the expense of the school division.



## **Independent Educational Evaluations (IEE)**

## Eligibility Committee Members:

- Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
  - Student Support Coordinator
  - School Psychologist
  - Social Worker
  - General Education Teacher
  - Special Education Teacher
  - Administrator/LEA (Local Education Agency)
- *May include others such as counselor, related service provider, nurse, and/or others invited by the parent*

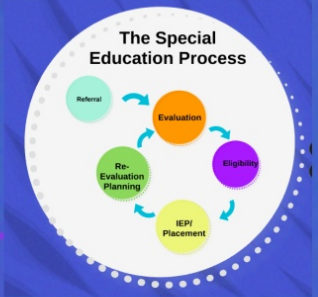


*Parents are equal members of the committee*

# Eligibility

**Disability  
Classifications  
in Virginia**

**Eligibility for  
Special  
Education**



In determining eligibility, the committee will review existing data to determine if a student meets the criteria for identification with one or more of the disability classifications:

## Classifications

- Autism
- Deaf-Blindness
- Developmental Delay (through age 6)
- Emotional Disability
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment, Including Blindness

The committee must consider the following questions:

1. Does the child **meet the criteria** for one or more of the educational disabilities included in the Virginia regulations?
2. Is there documentation of **adverse effect on educational performance** due to one or more documented characteristics of the disability?
3. Due to the disability, does the student **need specially designed instruction** to access and progress in the grade level curriculum?

If responses to all 3 questions are "yes", parent consent is required to find a student eligible.

(Parent consent is also required to terminate eligibility in Virginia)



**Eligibility  
Determination**

**Sample  
Worksheet**



The committee will use eligibility worksheets to determine eligibility.



Eligibility worksheets are posted on the PRC's website

Other Health Impairment Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_ D.O.B.: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

In application of the Virginia Department of Education's Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, this worksheet may assist the eligibility group in applying criteria for students who are being considered for eligibility under the category of Other Health Impairment. A diagnosis included in a report from a medical professional is not sufficient to make an eligibility determination. After consideration of data from multiple sources, review the definition, consider the items below, and note any additional information. Attach this worksheet to the Eligibility Summary Form and include any necessary documentation.

**DEFINITION:** "Other Health Impairment" means having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia and Tourette syndrome that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

STEP 1.

STEP 2.  
 True  
 False

There is documentation of an Other Health Impairment. The effect of the Other Health Impairment limits are identified and impacts the students in the area of (check all that apply):

- Strength
- Vitality
- Alertness (including heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment)

Indicate chronic or acute health condition:

<input type="checkbox"/> Asthma	<input type="checkbox"/> Attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder	<input type="checkbox"/> Heart condition
<input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes	<input type="checkbox"/> Epilepsy	<input type="checkbox"/> Leukemia
<input type="checkbox"/> Hemophilia	<input type="checkbox"/> Lead poisoning	<input type="checkbox"/> Sickle cell anemia
<input type="checkbox"/> Nephritis	<input type="checkbox"/> Rheumatic fever	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tourette syndrome	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe):	

List and/or describe:

AND

STEP 3.  
 True  
 False

There is documentation of an adverse effect on educational performance due to one or more documented characteristics of the Other Health Impairment.

List and/or describe:

AND

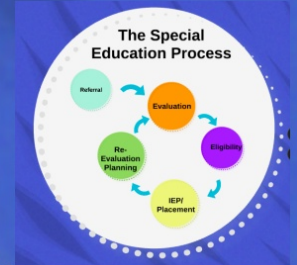
STEP 4.  
 True  
 False

Due to the identified Other Health Impairment, the student needs specially designed instruction.

List and/or describe:

## IEPs

- Are developed by a team that includes parents
- Address strengths and weaknesses through measurable annual goals, modifications, accommodations.
- Outline service delivery and are reviewed at least annually
- Must be developed within 30 calendar days of eligibility.

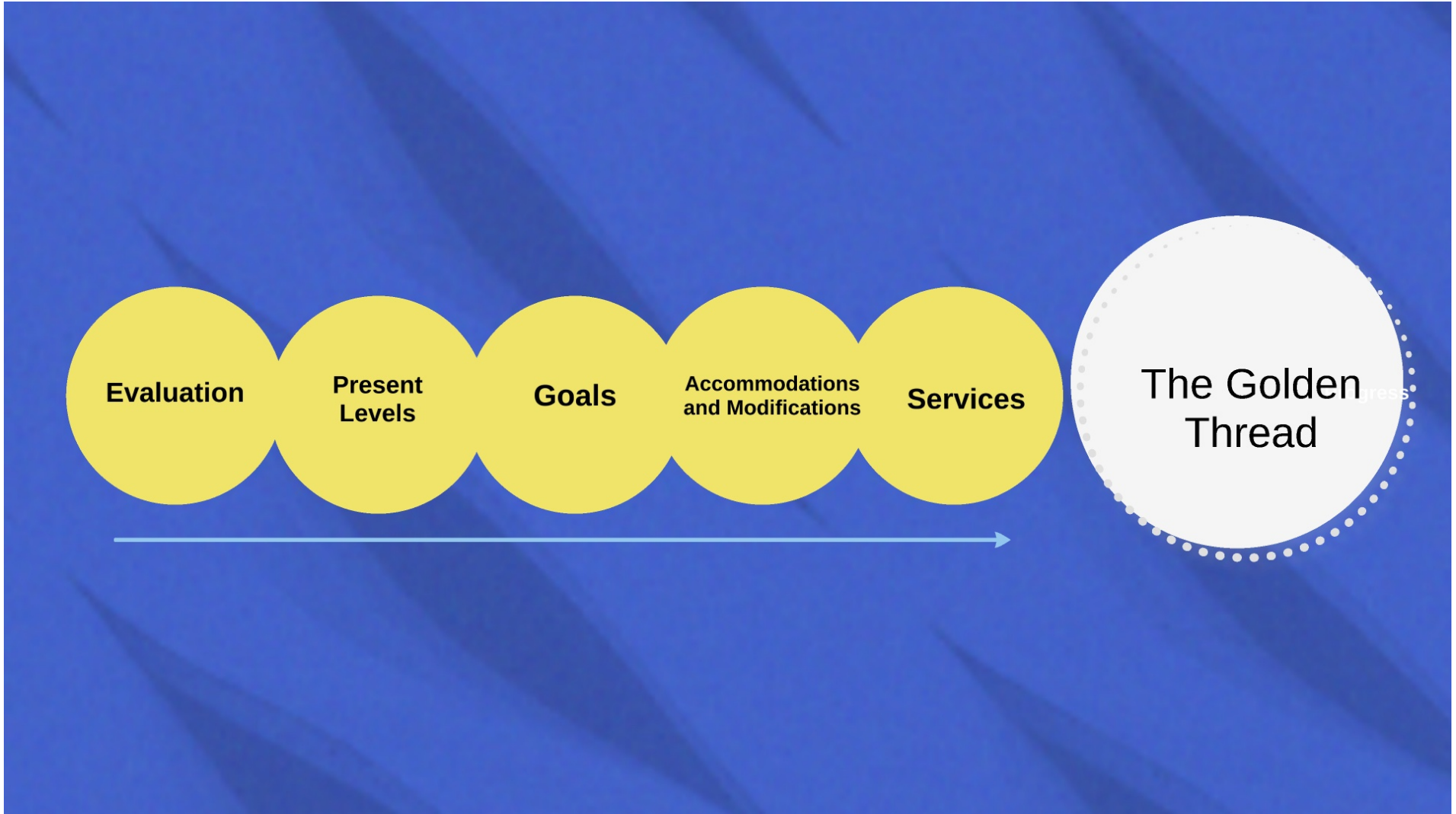


# Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

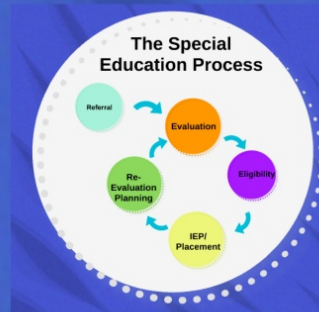
## *The Golden Thread*



*APS' best practice encourage forwarding a draft of the present levels and goal proposal at least two days prior to the IEP meeting.*



*At least every 3 years, the school must re-evaluate the child to determine whether the child is still a child with a disability who is in need of special education services.*



### **3 Year Re-Evaluation**

- A planning meeting determines whether additional assessments are needed to determine eligibility.
- Parents are participants in this meeting



**Active  
Engagement**



**Information  
Sharing**

**Decision-  
Makers**

**Teammates**

## **The Role of Families**

Active Engagement  
Information Sharing  
Teammates  
Decision-Makers



# Prepare to Engage!

- Think of yourself as your child's home-based case manager.
- Set up an organizational system for your child's educational records and special education materials.
- Use a calendar to anticipate upcoming meetings and timelines.
- Be proactive.
- Review information ahead of time & prepare for meetings.
- Be comfortable participating and advocating for your child. You have valuable information to share with the team!

## Active Engagement

*Parents are the constant, long-term members of their child's educational team.*

## Prepare to Communicate!

- Update team contact information each year & add to your record-keeping system.
- Establish an effective, two-way communication system with your child's teacher(s)/case-carrier
- Share questions, ideas and topics to consider with the team in advance of meetings
- Keep the team informed about progress you note at home
- Celebrate accomplishments!



**Share Information**

## Prepare to Collaborate!

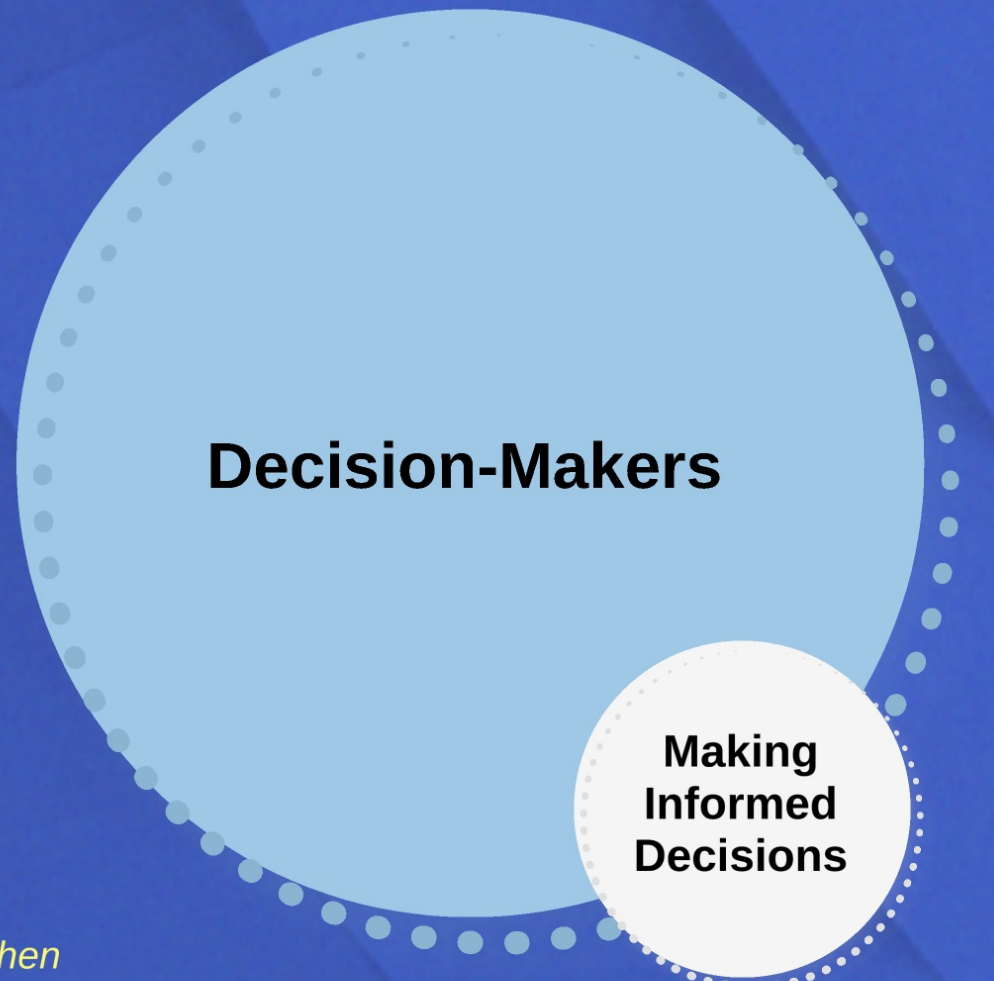
- View yourself as an equal member of the team
- Acknowledge mutual goals
- Share your knowledge and input with your teammates
- Encourage input from all team members
- Engage in open and honest communication
- Celebrate accomplishments!

## Teammates





Parent consent is required for evaluation, eligibility, and IEP decisions.



**NOTE:** Consent transfers to students when they reach the age of majority (18).

# Prepare to make decisions!

- Be mindful of potential outcomes of each meeting
- Ask for clarification and additional information if needed
- Discuss options/next steps

**Connect  
with  
Resources**

**Engage in  
collaborative  
problem-solving  
as needed**

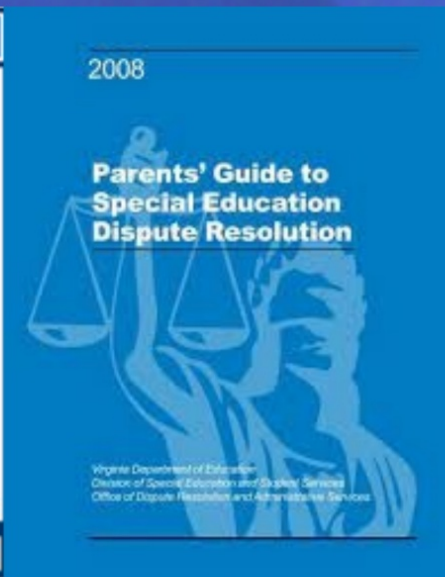
## Informed Decision Making



# Prepare to be a collaborative problem-solver if needed!

## Conflict resolution tools

- Keep the focus on your child
- Acknowledge mutual goals
- Shift disagreements into invitations to collaborate
- Use APS' *communication flow chart* to seek support for teams (or yourself) if needed
- Learn about VDOE's dispute resolution options, including mediation and due process hearings
- Preserve relationships



# Connect with Resources

## Special Education Parent Resource Center (PRC)

Syphax Education Center  
2110 Washington Boulevard, Suite 158  
Arlington, VA 22204



PRC  
Supports

Individual  
Consultations

School and  
Community  
Connections

Parent Learning  
Opportunities

Lending Library,  
Resources & Tools

Visit us at:

[www.apsva.us/prc](http://www.apsva.us/prc)

Contact us at:

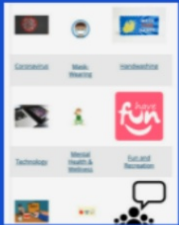
703.228.7239

[prc@apsva.us](mailto:prc@apsva.us)

We look forward to connecting with you.

Lending Library, Resources & Tools  
[apsva.us/prc](http://apsva.us/prc)

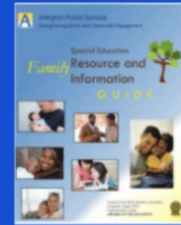
Online  
Tools & Resources



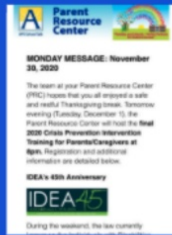
Lending  
Library



Family Resource &  
Information Guide



School Talk  
Messages



PRC Supports

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**Bottom  
Line**

# **Questions & Answers**



*Your involvement makes a difference in your child's education*

*Please let us know how the Parent Resource Center (PRC) may be of assistance to you.*

*We would be grateful if you would complete the session evaluation for any feedback to help us in the future.*

*Thank you for your support!*

**You Make A Difference.**

**You Got THIS!**

