

Special Education in SC: FAQs

For parents who would like to request testing through the school, what is the best avenue for making this request? How can parents start this process?

Parents can request an individualized evaluation of their child by contacting the special education director of the district in which they reside. They should begin this process by writing a letter to request a full and individual initial evaluation be conducted to determine if their child meets the qualifications of a child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In their letter, the parent should describe why they believe an evaluation is needed and include copies of any medical records or other supporting information that might further explain why they are requesting an evaluation. In South Carolina, initial evaluations must be conducted within 60 days of a parent's consent.

How can parents get more involved in their child's IEP process?

Parents should be encouraged to learn about their rights and responsibilities when it comes to their child's education. The law gives parents full rights to participate in and make decisions about their child's IEP. They must be invited to the meeting and can participate in decisions pertaining to their child's education. They are legally considered part of the IEP team and must be included. Parents have a unique insight about their child and can provide input on how their child functions at home. This information can provide a fuller, more accurate picture of their child current skill levels.

What barriers do you notice that parents face when it comes to advocating for their children in the school system? How do you recommend that parents overcome those barriers?

A barrier that I've noticed is a lack of parent education and time to commit to parental involvement. Understanding the special education services available to their child and their rights in the IEP process is very important. Parents must also be encouraged to take the time to learn all they can about their child's challenges and ways to help them overcome these challenges. Parents must learn to speak up about what their child needs. Networking with other parents might be beneficial as well. Another barrier that parents face is that they are often told to seek guardianship without a thorough explanation of the costs, long-term impact, or less restrictive alternatives to guardianship that allow their loved one with a disability to retain control of their lives and their rights. You can find a guide to Age of Majority for students with IEPs in South Carolina here. More information about the South Carolina Supported Decision Making Project can be found here.

Who is the parent's best contact person in the school when it comes to advocating for their child's needs?

It's important to build a relationship with school personnel and administrators by being involved and engaging with their child's teachers. Their child's teacher should always be the first point of contact when advocating for their child's needs.

What should parents do if they feel like their voice is not being heard?

It's important to put any concerns they may have in writing. You can be assertive and express your views in an honest, straightforward, and calm manner while respecting the rights of others. Strong parent-school partnerships are important, but if they feel like their voice is still not being heard, they may want to consider finding a special education advocate to help.

For more information about special education services in South Carolina and the resources available to assist in the IEP process, they can visit The Arc of South Carolina's IEP Assistance page here.