



You're Not Alone



WRITTEN BY
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ESQUIRE

When our son, Massi, was 18 months old, he was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Today he is an incredibly loving, empathetic, friendly, happy, funny, popular eight-year-old in a regular education classroom and at the top of his class when it comes to math. I attribute this to the fantastic physicians and interventional therapists he had when he was under three and the amazing support he has had in the community and at school since then.

If you feel like your child may be delayed in any way, there is a bunch of support out there for you. New Jersey has "Project Child Find" to help children obtain early intervention from birth through two years old and assist local school districts in identifying children under three years old who are in need of special education and related services. **School districts are obligated to not only provide special education related services to children with disabilities but also to identify children who may have disabilities.**

Whether your child is three years old with a confirmed disability or ten years old with a suspected disability, you can have him or her evaluated by your local school district. Send a letter to the Director or Supervisor of Special Education in your school district explaining your concerns about your child's educational progress and/or confirmed diagnoses and request that a meeting be held. Make sure to include your contact information and date the letter.

Within 20 days the school must hold a meeting to discuss whether an evaluation will be conducted. **You are an important member of the team and your input is critical.** A decision will be made whether or not your child should be evaluated to determine if there is a need for special education services. If the determination is made by the team that evaluations are warranted, with your consent, they will begin the evaluation process with at least two child study team members and possibly other specialists. Within 90 days the evaluations will be complete and you will have

a meeting to determine eligibility. Ten days before the meeting you will be provided with the reports of the evaluations so that you can meaningfully participate at the meeting.

Your child is eligible for special education and related services if he or she has a disability that adversely affects educational performance. If your child is in fifth grade reading at a second grade level, his educational performance is clearly being affected and he should be evaluated for a disability. If your child has a severe peanut allergy but she is performing above grade level, she has a disability but it likely is not affecting her educational performance. Grades are not the standard, though; it's the evaluation results that are key!

If you disagree with the evaluation results, you are entitled to ask for independent evaluations at no cost to you and the district must provide you with a list of approved providers to do the evaluations or file for due process. You must ask for the independent evaluations all at the same time in the same area or even in an area that your child was not originally tested. For example, let's say the district did an educational and psychological evaluation and you disagree with the results of the educational evaluation. You can have an independent evaluation done by an education consultant and speech therapist, if you believe it is necessary.

The New Jersey Department of Education has issued a handbook titled "Parental Rights in Special Education" (PRISE). A simple internet search will give you access to the entire handbook. It is a very helpful guide for providing basic guidance and the steps in the education process.

The District is tasked with ensuring your child obtains the proper education, and as a society we all benefit when children leave school prepared to obtain a job or go to college. If you feel like you need help beyond the PRISE guide, please call me. *You are not alone.* 🦋

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