

A photograph of a woman wearing a light pink hijab and a long, flowing floral dress with a brown belt. She is smiling and looking down at a young girl. The girl is wearing a pink jacket, blue jeans, and a backpack, and is looking up at the woman. They are walking on a sidewalk in front of a brick building with large windows.

Empowering Every Family

Tip sheets on multilingual learners, special education, and family engagement

About MAEC

MAEC is a national education non-profit dedicated to fostering positive learning environments where every child reaches their full potential.

We partner with districts and schools across the country to improve systems and strengthen family-school partnerships. MAEC operates the Center for Education Equity, the U.S. Department of Education's Region I and III Equity Assistance Center, and leads Maine's Statewide Family Engagement Center, Consortium for Engaging Families Across Maine (CEFAM).

About CEFAM

The Consortium for Engaging Families Across Maine (CEFAM) is MAEC's Statewide Family Engagement Center for the state of Maine. We help build sustainable infrastructure to support healthy family, student, and community engagement.

CEFAM serves families and educators – from state agencies to school districts to school staff and early care providers – by developing resources, co-designing learning opportunities, and fostering dialogue designed to help families connect with local schools and support their children's development and learning.

Authorship

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Disclaimer

MAEC is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of education. The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Department). The Department does not mandate or prescribe practices, models, or other activities described or discussed in this document. The contents of this presentation may contain examples of, adaptations of, and links to resources created and maintained by another public or private organization. The Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. The content of this presentation does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department. This publication is not intended to represent the views or policy of, or be an endorsement of any views expressed or materials provided by, any Federal agency. [89 FR 70333, Aug. 29, 2024]

Suggested citation: Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. (2026). Empowering Every Family: Tip sheets on multilingual learners, special education, and family engagement. Silver Spring, MD. July 2026.

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How to use Empowering Every Family tip sheets

This resource supports parents and caregivers in partnering with their child's school. This resource provides information related to the following:

- Family engagement with schools
- Support for multilingual learners and their families
- Special education services

To get started, parents and caregivers should review the information and bring the tip sheets to meetings with school staff. You can also request communication in your primary language.

How the tip sheets are organized

Each two-sided tip sheet includes sections with important information for parents and caregivers:

- **Words you should know:** Definitions of words and phrases related to educational programs, laws, policies, and practices
- **Policies and laws:** Summaries of the laws and policies that protect the rights of students, parents, or caregivers, and the responsibilities of education agencies, including school districts
- **Things you can do:** Actions you can take to stand up for your rights and support your child in school
- **Resources and examples:** Additional information to help you support your child or learn more about your rights
- **Questions to ask your child's school:** A list of questions that can help you have important conversations with your child's school and teachers about topics in this guide

How school staff can support

School staff should distribute these tip sheets widely to families, such as through resource centers, libraries, and community spaces. This resource can support family leadership programs and improve learning outcomes by fostering clear communication, understanding, and collaboration.

MAEC can provide technical assistance and resources to schools and districts to increase success for multilingual learners. Ask to speak with someone by emailing info@maec.org.

What families should know about...

Parents and caregivers' right to be involved in their child's education



Words you should know

Parental/family engagement

Regular communication with and participation in your child's school to support their learning and development.

Parent Family Engagement (PFE) policies

Policies that explain how a school district creates partnerships and communicates with students' families. These policies also explain how a district will get input from families to make decisions.

Parent-School Compact

A written agreement between parents, students, and the school that explains how they will work together to support student learning and success.

Parent-teacher conferences

Meetings held with teachers and students' families to discuss how students are progressing academically and socially in school.

Title I

A federal program that gives money to districts and schools that serve low-income families. The program's goal is to improve students' learning and family engagement in schools.

Policies and laws

As a parent or caregiver, you have the legal right to take an active role in your child's education, regardless of your immigration status or how much English you understand, speak, or write.

Schools must provide families with communication about school programs, their child's progress, and school expectations.

Schools hold parent-teacher conferences at least once a year to discuss your child's progress. You also have the right to request meetings with teachers outside of parent-teacher conference times to talk about your child's academic progress in a language you can understand.

Schools must provide materials, training, and programs that can help families support their children's learning. If your child's school receives Title I federal funds, it should have written policies that explain ways in which parents and caregivers will be involved in their children's education.

What families should know about...

Parents and caregivers' right to be involved in their child's education



Questions to ask your child's school

1. How do I get involved in the school? Can I volunteer at the school?
2. Are there any groups or programs for families of multilingual learners or for immigrant families? How do I join?
3. What is my child learning in school? What are the learning goals in my child's classes? Who can provide that information?
4. How often does the school send progress reports home?

Things you can do

- **Ask parents, caregivers, teachers, and school staff** how to get involved in your child's learning and school.
- **Volunteer at your child's school** in person, virtually, and in other ways to stay involved.
- **Ask if your child's school has PFE policies.** These policies can be found on district or school websites or in school handbooks that are sent home at the beginning of the school year. Ask school staff for help if you cannot find the policies.
- **Contact community organizations and out-of-school programs** that can help you support your child's learning.

Resources and examples

Portland Empowered helps students, families, educators, and community members be included in decisions about public schools. Visit www.portlandempowered.org to learn more.



For more information, please visit the **Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage** at <https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.



What families should know about...

The benefits of family engagement



Words you should know

Parental engagement or family engagement

Regular communication with and participation in your child's school to support their learning and development.

Two-way communication

Communication between families and school staff that can be verbal or written. When communication is two-way, families and schools exchange information between each other.

Policies and laws

As a parent or caregiver, you have the legal right to take an active role in your child's education, no matter your immigration status or level of English.

When families are engaged in their children's education, the children are more likely to achieve the following:

- Complete schoolwork and homework
- Perform better academically
- Attend school consistently
- Show positive behavior
- Have improved social skills
- Feel positive about going to school
- Graduate from high school and continue their education

Parental and family engagement benefits you and your community, too. When you get involved in your child's education, you will:

- Become more comfortable in the school environment
- Gain confidence in your parenting skills
- Feel more capable of helping your children learn
- Be more likely to continue your own education

What families should know about...

The benefits of family engagement



Questions to ask your child's school

1. How can I get involved in the school? Can I volunteer at the school?
2. Are there any groups or programs for families of multilingual learners or for immigrant families? How do I join?
3. What is my child learning in school? What are the learning goals in my child's classes? Who can provide that information?
4. How often does the school send progress reports home?

Things you can do

- **Develop relationships with your child's teachers** so that school and family are on the same team to support your child.
- **Meet regularly with your child's teacher** to foster open, two-way communication and build trust to make the best decisions for your child's learning.
- **Participate in school events** to learn more about your child's experience in school. You have a right to participate in your child's education.
- **Share your questions, concerns, and opinions with your child's school.** This helps teachers learn more about their students and improve connections with the community. You have a right to communicate with school staff.

Resources and examples

Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services (MEIRS) offers whole family services that support families with tools and resources. Find out more at <https://meirs.org/whole-family-services/>.



For more information, please visit the **Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage** at <https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.



What families should know about...

Rights for parents and caregivers for multilingual learners



Words you should know

English Language Proficiency or ELP

The level of English learning needed for a student to take general education classes without English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services.

English for Speakers of Other Languages Program, ESOL, or ESOL Program

Services that support a student in learning to read, write, speak, and listen in English.

Method of Instruction

The program or system a school uses to teach multilingual learner (ML) students the English language and academic content.

Multilingual Learner or ML

A student identified as needing ESOL services based on testing and the Language Use Survey.

Policies and laws

Federal law and the Maine Human Rights Act say that school districts must make sure multilingual students and their families can use and understand school programs and services that are available.

If your child is identified as a multilingual learner (ML), they should receive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services to help them learn to read, write, speak, and listen in English. You have the right to accept or decline ESOL services.

Schools must inform you that your child is eligible within 30 days and explain the following information:

- How your child was identified for ESOL services
- Your child's current English Language Proficiency (ELP) level and current academic performance
- The method of instruction that will be used to teach your child English
- How the method of instruction will help your child learn English and grade-level academic content
- The requirements your child must meet to exit the ESOL program

You also have the right to get information about any special education services your child receives in addition to ESOL services.

What families should know about...

Rights for parents and caregivers for multilingual learners



Questions to ask your child's school

1. What programs does the school offer to help my child learn English? How do I enroll my child in an English language program?
2. How will you ensure my child gets the support they need in English language classes and other subjects like math and reading?
3. How is my child doing academically and behaviorally in school? How is my child doing with learning English?
4. How does the school share important information with families?

Things you can do

- **Make sure you understand all documents and options** before signing them or agreeing to any actions your school determines for your child. If you do not understand, ask questions or request an interpreter.
- **Request information about ESOL services** or programs for your child. You have a right to request meetings with school staff.
- **Ask if there is an online portal** for parents and caregivers to get important information about your child's progress and school updates. Ask school staff to show you how to access and use the portal.

Resources and examples

Maine Parent Federation, the state Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), offers support for children with disabilities. Visit their website at www.mpf.org.



For more information, please visit the **Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage** at <https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.



What families should know about...

Being a voice for your child



Words you should know

Advocate

Supporting or speaking up for rights, needs, or interests. You can advocate for your child, other families, your community, or yourself.

Educational Advocate

A person who works on behalf of students to ensure they receive appropriate support, services, and rights, particularly in special education.

Parental advocacy

When a parent or caregiver makes informed decisions for their child, speaks up, raises concerns, and asks for help.

Policies and laws

As a parent or caregiver, you have the right to advocate for your child. You can advocate for your child, your rights, and your school community in different ways:

- Representing your child in meetings when needed and/or when you think it is important.
- Participating in school programs and events.
- Making recommendations for how to help your child and support the school community.
- Participating in advocacy activities by yourself, with community organizations, or with other parents and caregivers.

To be a good advocate for your child...

- Stay informed about their progress in school. You have the right to contact teachers and administrators and ask questions about your child's progress.
- Become a family leader who helps guide other families in the school community.
- Seek help from an educational advocate when you need additional support.

What families should know about...

Being a voice for your child



Questions to ask your child's school

1. Is there a parent or family liaison, parent group, or organization I can contact for support?
2. Who do I contact if I have concerns or questions about my child's progress or with any experiences or incidents happening at school?
3. How do I track my child's progress in school? How will I receive updates on my child's progress?

Things you can do

- **Speak up for your child in meetings with school staff.** Prepare questions, concerns, and issues you would like to discuss in the conversation beforehand.
- **Learn your child's needs and goals.** Review their grades, educational history, and overall performance. Ask your child what their goals are, how they feel about school, who their favorite teachers are, etc.
- **Support your child in making choices about their education.** Support your child in choosing courses, especially in high school, and learn about test information, college admissions, and financial aid planning.
- **Learn about the school system,** including what administrators, teachers, and principals do, as well as school and local policies and state and federal education laws.

Resources and examples

Mano en Mano

empowers immigrants, migrant farmworkers, and Latinos in Downeast Maine to change their communities. Visit <https://www.manomaine.org/advocacy>.



For more information, please visit the **Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage** at <https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.



What families should know about...

Translation and interpretation



Words you should know

Interpretation

Changing a spoken language from one language to another language.

Language access

A legal requirement that says schools must communicate information to multilingual families in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is shared in English.

Language Access Plan

A document that school districts create explaining how they and your child's school will provide communications that multilingual families can understand.

Translation

Changing written text from one language to another language.

Policies and laws

You have the right to request interpretation and translation services from schools even if your child is proficient in English.

- Schools must have a process to identify multilingual families.
- You have the right to language assistance provided by qualified professionals.
- Schools may not rely on or ask students, siblings, friends, or untrained school staff to translate or interpret for parents and caregivers.
- You may also provide your own interpreter, such as a family member. This is your decision.

You have the right to receive information from your child's school in a language you can understand about any program, service, or activity that is shared with families who are proficient in English.

Schools must translate documents or provide an interpreter to help you understand documents into your primary language, including:

- Report cards
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) documentation
- Notices of parent-teacher conferences (in the languages most commonly spoken in the school)

What families should know about...

Translation and interpretation



Questions to ask your child's school

1. How do I request an interpreter for meetings with school staff or school events?
2. How can I get translated copies of written materials the school sends home or gives me during school meetings or events?
3. I speak a language other than English. How can I contact my child's teacher(s) and the school staff so we understand each other?
4. Is there an interpreter who can help me communicate with teachers and school staff?
5. How do I request additional support if I do not receive translation or interpretation services?

Things you can do

- **Ask your child's school what translation and interpretation services they provide.** Services should be included in the school district's language access plan and website.
- **Request translations** or explanations from interpreters of test results and any reports of your child's progress.
- **Request translated versions** of school policies, calendars, and other important information.
- **Do not sign any paperwork or agree to any actions** until you understand the information and agree to what is being asked of you.
- **Request support if you are denied language assistance.** Reach out to the school principal or the school district superintendent's office in writing. Keep a record of all written communication.

Resources and examples

The Maine DOE offers a **Language Identification Card** you can use to let school staff know you need interpretation and translation services. Download the PDF card at <https://bit.ly/3PnNJbt>.



For more information, please visit the **Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage** at <https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.



What families should know about...

Undocumented students' rights



Words you should know

Directory information

Basic information about your child, like their name, address, phone number, date, and place of birth.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, pronounced *Fur-puh*)

A federal law that gives parents and caregivers the right to access their child's school records, ask the school to correct information in the records, and control who can see the information in the records. When a student turns 18 or starts college, these rights transfer from the parent or caregiver to the student.

Proof of citizenship or Immigration documentation

Documents that show a person's legal status in the U.S., such as a passport, social security card, or residency card (green card). Schools cannot ask for proof of citizenship, and it is not required to enroll in US schools.

School enrollment

Signing up your child to attend a school in the area where they live.

Verification documents

Documents a school can ask for to confirm your child's age and where they live to make sure they're placed in the right grade and school.

Policies and laws

All school-age children in the U.S. have the right to a free public education, regardless of their or their parents/caregivers' immigration or citizenship status.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) says schools cannot share student information or records with police, federal agents, or immigration officials without the written permission of a parent or caregiver, unless the information is requested through a valid court order.

Schools cannot ask for proof of citizenship or immigration documents. Schools can share directory information without your permission, but you can request that the school not share your child's directory information with anyone.

Schools can ask for documents to verify your child's age and where they live:

- Medical records, immunization records, or birth certificate to determine your child's age.
- A signed rental agreement or lease, a recent utility bill, or a mortgage statement to verify that your child lives in the area that qualifies to attend that school.

Students have a right to be protected from bullying, discrimination, and harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, and ability/disability, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status.

What families should know about...

Undocumented students' rights



Questions to ask your child's school

1. What documents do I need to enroll my child in school?
2. How will the school determine my child's grade level?
3. How will the school respond if my child is bullied or discriminated against because of their race, language, where they come from, or other identity?

Things you can do

- **Ask the school what documents are required for enrollment.** You can also look up the documents you need on the school district or school website.
- **Schedule a meeting with a family liaison or coordinator** if the school has one. They can explain how to enroll your child and how you can engage with school staff and teachers.
- **Let the school know if you do not want your child's directory information to be shared.** Schools can share directory information about your child, including their name and address, without your permission. You can let the school know that you want to opt out of sharing directory information about your child.
- **Contact community, state, or national advocacy organizations** in your community and ask about legal assistance or support for you, or for undocumented students and their families.

Resources and examples

Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP) provides legal services, community legal education, and advocacy for immigrants and their families. Visit <https://ilapmaine.org>.



For more information, please visit the **Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage** at <https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.



What families should know about...

Multilingual learner identification



Words you should know

English Language Proficiency or ELP

The level of English learning needed for a student to take general education classes without English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services.

English for Speakers of Other Languages Program, ESOL, or ESOL Program

Services that support students in general education learning to read, write, speak, and listen in English.

General education class or General education program

The standard academic program for all students. ESOL services are part of general education.

Language Use Survey or LUS

The first form parents and caregivers complete in the identification process. It includes three required questions, but schools can ask additional questions.

Multilingual Learner or ML

A student who is identified as needing ESOL services based on the Language Use Survey and English proficiency screening.

WIDA Screener Test

A test used in Maine schools that measures how well a student reads, writes, listens, and speaks in English. The test results help schools identify multilingual learner students.

Policies and laws

States have a process guided by federal law to determine whether a student is a multilingual learner (ML). In Maine, schools determine whether a child qualifies for ML services by:

1. Having parents and caregivers complete the Language Use Survey (LUS)
2. If the LUS shows that your child might be an ML, the school will assess your child's reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English using the WIDA Screener Test.

If your child is identified as an ML, their school must provide them with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services.

Parents and caregivers have the right to speak with teachers and school staff, access interpreters, and receive information in their primary language.

You have the right to decline ESOL services for your child. However, the school is still required to assess your child every year to measure their progress in learning English.

By the time students exit the ESOL program, they should be able to complete schoolwork in English, just like students who are not multilingual learners.

What families should know about...

Multilingual learner identification



Questions to ask your child's school

1. How do I find out if my child will receive ESOL services?
2. How does the school determine what ESOL services my child will receive?
3. What services can my child receive to help them learn English and do their schoolwork in English?
4. How do I learn more about my child's progress in learning English?

Things you can do

- **Request to speak with school staff** if you have questions or concerns.
- **Request information and notices** in your primary language.
- **Request an interpreter** if you prefer a language other than English.
- **Find more information** at the Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage:
<https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.

Resources and examples

Access the Maine Language Use Survey through the Maine Department of Education, available in 30 languages. Get enrollment resources at <https://bit.ly/42xvWSe>.



Learn more about the WIDA Screener Test, available in various languages at <https://bit.ly/48vx3VW>.



What families should know about...

Exiting the English for Speakers of Other Languages program



Words you should know

English Language Proficiency or ELP

The level of English learning needed for a student to take general education classes without English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services.

English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessment

A test that measures how well a student can use the four domains of language in English.

Four Domains of Language

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

General education class or General education program

The standard academic program for all students. ESOL services are part of general education.

WIDA ACCESS

A test that is given to ML students each year in grades K-12 to measure their progress in learning English. It is usually taken on a computer, but can also be on paper.

Title III

A federal law that says multilingual learner (ML) students must reach proficiency in English and general education academic standards.

Policies and laws

Title III provides federal funds to schools to support multilingual learners (ML) so they can successfully learn English and grade-level content in all subjects.

ML students are assessed in the four language domains at least once each year to see how well they are learning English.

ML students can exit the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program and continue taking general education classes when they meet their school's language proficiency levels and grade-level standards in core subject assessments.

After students exit the ESOL program, schools must monitor their academic progress for at least two years to make sure they meet the state standards for their grade level in different subjects.

In Maine, ML students must get an overall score of 4.5 on WIDA ACCESS to be proficient. If a student qualifies for WIDA Alternate ACCESS, they must get an overall score of 4.0 to be proficient.

What families should know about...

Exiting the English for Speakers of Other Languages program



Questions to ask your child's school

1. What tests will my child have to take to exit the ESOL program? When are the tests given?
2. What is the school's ELP level for reading, writing, speaking, and listening?
3. What kind of help will my child receive if they exit the program, but start to struggle in general education classes?
4. How do I help my child reach ELP if I do not understand or speak English?

Things you can do

- **Ask your child's teacher about your child's progress** toward reaching the school's ELP level.
- **Monitor your child's grades** on report cards, online parent portals, classwork, and assessments in their grade-level subjects like reading, math, science, and social studies.
- **Request an explanation of the test results** from a teacher or assessment coordinator and what it means for your child's progress. You can also request an interpreter to help you understand test results in your primary language.
- **Find more information** at the Maine DOE Multilingual Learners webpage: <https://bit.ly/3Qzzrox>.

Resources and examples

WIDA ACCESS is an assessment used to measure MLs' progress in learning English. Download an info flyer in your preferred language at <https://bit.ly/4uslW9f>.



Learn more about what your child's WIDA ACCESS scores mean and get questions to ask teachers from this worksheet: <https://bit.ly/3OGhc3>.



What families should know about...

Multilingual learners with disabilities



Words you should know

English for Speakers of Other Languages Program, ESOL, or ESOL Program

Services that support students in general education learning to read, write, speak, and listen in English.

Individualized Education Program or IEP

A legal document addressing the child's disability, their unique learning needs, services they will receive, and specific educational goals.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) team

A team that includes regular and special education teachers, the child's parents, and school staff. The IEP team:

- Determines eligibility for special education services.
- Develops and monitors education plans for students with disabilities.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

A federal law that makes a free appropriate public education available to children with disabilities and ensures they get special education and related services. IDEA says a student cannot be identified with a disability if the main cause for the diagnosis is "limited English proficiency."

Special education services

A free service offered by schools to students with disabilities. It might include instruction, therapy, behavior support, or social-emotional support.

Policies and laws

Schools must provide all the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and special education services your child needs. Your child can receive special education services regardless of their or your immigration status.

You can request that your child be evaluated for special education services. Evaluations of multilingual learners (ML) must:

- Be done by qualified staff members
- Consider the student's language needs

If your child is eligible for special education services and is an ML, an ESOL teacher will be a part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Your child's language needs must be considered in creating the IEP goals. Your child can exit the ESOL program and still receive special education services.

You have a right to request support from an interpreter in your primary language to help you understand documents about your child's evaluation and special education program.

The school may or may not recommend special education services or other supports for your child's learning. You can disagree with the school's evaluation or the services they offer. You can reach out to your school district's special education department or the Maine Department of Education Office of Special Services and Inclusive Education for help.

What families should know about...

Multilingual learners with disabilities



Questions to ask your child's school

1. How will the school evaluate my child for special education services? Who can explain the process to me?
2. How will the IEP team consider my child's culture and language to make sure their learning challenges are related to a disability?
3. Who can explain the results of my child's evaluation for special education services?
4. What language development and special education services is my child eligible to receive?

Things you can do

- **You have the right to decline, change, or stop special education services.** You should understand the school's recommendations before making a decision. You can also contact the Maine Department of Education Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education to explain your rights and options to resolve the issue.
- **Request an interpreter to help you** understand your child's IEP in your primary language.
- **Communicate with the ESOL staff members** on the evaluation team. ESOL staff can help determine whether the difficulties your child is having are due to language needs.
- **Engage in parent groups, networks, and organizations,** and participate in community efforts to support children with disabilities. Also, talk with your child's teachers and school staff.

Resources and examples

Maine Parent Federation, the state Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), offers support for children with disabilities. Visit their website at www.mpf.org.



For more information, please visit the **Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education** at <https://bit.ly/3P07eqv>.



What families should know about...

Rights for parents and caregivers of children with disabilities



Words you should know

Child with a disability

A child who learns or develops in ways that may be different across areas such as learning, movement, communication, or behavior, and who may benefit from specialized instruction and additional supports at school.

Evaluation

The process to determine whether a child has a disability.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

A federal law that makes a free appropriate public education available to children with disabilities and ensures they get special education. IDEA says a student cannot be identified with a disability if the main cause for the diagnosis is “limited English proficiency.”

Individualized Education Program or IEP

A legal document addressing the child’s disability, their unique learning needs, services they will receive, and specific educational goals.

Policies and laws

Parents and caregivers have the right to make decisions and attend meetings about their children’s education.

Your child’s school must get your consent or permission for:

- The initial evaluation or re-evaluation of your child
- Providing special education services
- Inviting representatives from other agencies to attend IEP team meetings

You do not have to give your consent and can change your mind at any time. You must let the school know in writing if you do not consent.

You also have the right to disagree with decisions the school system makes about special education services your child receives.

You have the right to get an independent evaluation if you disagree with the school’s evaluation. You can also contact your school district’s special education department or the Maine Department of Education Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education for help.

You can also contact the Maine Department of Education Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education to explain your rights, options, actions you can take to resolve the issue, and connect you with other agencies or support services.

What families should know about...

Rights for parents and caregivers of children with disabilities



Questions to ask your child's school

1. I was told that the school thinks my child may need special education services. Who can explain this to me?
2. How will my child be evaluated to determine if they have a disability?
3. How will my child receive services to meet their needs that also support their English language learning?

Things you can do

- **Request an interpreter to help you** understand your child's IEP and any other documents about your child in your primary language. You can request that important information be given to you in writing so you can review it with an interpreter.
- **Participate in all meetings regarding your child.** These meetings can be overwhelming or intimidating, but your input is important because you know your child best. If you cannot attend in person, the school should allow you to participate via phone or video.
- **Request an independent educational evaluation (IEE)** in writing if you disagree with the results of the school's evaluation of your child for special education services.

Resources and examples

Maine Parent Federation, the state Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), offers support for children with disabilities. Visit their website at www.mpf.org.



For more information, please visit the **Office of Special Services & Inclusive Education** at <https://bit.ly/3P07eqv>.



What families should know about...

Disability identification, eligibility, and assessment



Words you should know

Evaluation

The process to determine whether a child has a disability.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) team

A team that includes regular and special education teachers, the child's parents, and other school staff. The IEP team:

- Determines eligibility for special education services.
- Develops education plans for students' disabilities and meets to discuss progress at least annually.

Special education referral

A formal, written request to a school district to evaluate a child (ages 3–21) suspected of having a disability that affects their learning.

Special education services

Free services schools offer to students with disabilities, including instruction, therapy, behavior support, or social-emotional support.

Policies and laws

You have the right to submit a referral to have your child evaluated for a disability. You can request that your child be evaluated for special education services at any time.

The school can also refer your child for an evaluation if they think your child has a disability that affects their learning. The school must:

- Get your consent or permission in writing before starting the evaluation.
- Complete the evaluation within 45 school days of receiving your written consent.
- Use interpreters, as needed, throughout the evaluation process.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team must communicate the results of the evaluation. The results should include your child's strengths and weaknesses, as well as whether they have a disability that makes them eligible for special education services. If your child is not eligible, the IEP team will work with you to determine the appropriate supports to meet your child's learning needs.

The IEP team re-evaluates students who receive special education services every three years to determine whether they remain eligible for those services.

If your child is a multilingual learner with an eligible disability, they have the right to receive both language and special education services.

What families should know about...

Disability identification, eligibility, and assessment



Questions to ask your child's school

1. The school thinks my child needs special education services. Who can explain this to me?
2. How will my child be evaluated in both their primary language and in English?
3. What groups or organizations are available to support children with disabilities and their families?

Things you can do

- **Learn about your child's disability.** Find as much information as possible about your child's disability from your child's doctor, your child's teacher(s), the school psychologist, the internet, etc.
- **Keep track of documents needed for meetings.** Schools must provide documents about your child. You can request additional copies of any documents you need.
- **Confirm that an interpreter will attend your child's IEP meeting** if you need one.
- **Request that your child's language needs be considered in their evaluation** to get the most accurate results about their learning and behavior needs.
- **Engage in parent groups, networks, and organizations,** and participate in community efforts to support children with disabilities.

Resources and examples

Maine Parent Federation, the state Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), offers support for children with disabilities. Visit their website at www.mpf.org.



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What families should know about...

Placement and Individualized Education Program (IEP)



Words you should know

Child with a disability

A child who learns or develops in ways that may be different across areas such as learning, movement, communication, or behavior, and who benefits from specialized instruction and additional supports at school.

Individualized Education Program or IEP

A legal document addressing the child's disability, their unique learning needs, services they will receive, and specific educational goals.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) team

A team that includes regular and special education teachers, the child's parents, and other school staff. The IEP team:

- Determines eligibility for special education services.
- Develops education plans for students disabilities and meets to discuss progress at least annually.

Policies and laws

If the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines your child is eligible for special education services, they will develop an IEP. A written copy of the IEP will be sent to you within 21 school days.

You must provide written consent before your child can begin receiving special education services. You have the right to receive information about your child in a language you can understand. You have the right to receive support from an interpreter in your primary language to help you understand your child's IEP, assessments, notices, and any information about the services provided to your child.

An IEP meeting will be scheduled to review the IEP with you and other members of the IEP team. You will receive a copy of the IEP.

- The school must give you verbal and written notice about the meeting in advance and schedule the meeting at a time and place that works for you.
- IEP meetings can be held without parents or caregivers if they cannot attend.
- There will be at least one annual IEP meeting to monitor your child's progress and make any needed changes to the IEP.

IEP meetings include you, your child's classroom teacher, the IEP team, and other school staff who work with your child. You can request a meeting with the IEP team at any time to discuss concerns about your child's special education program.

What families should know about...

Placement and Individualized Education Program (IEP)



Questions to ask your child's school

1. How do I participate in my child's IEP team?
2. If my child has an IEP, how do I confirm they are receiving the required support?
3. How will my child receive their IEP services and support for their English language learning?

Things you can do

- **Confirm that an interpreter** will attend your child's IEP meeting if you need one.
- **Participate in IEP meetings and any other meetings about your child.** These meetings can be overwhelming or intimidating, but your input is important because you know your child best. If you cannot attend in person, the school should allow you to participate via phone or video.
- **During the meeting, share what you know about your child.** You will be asked how your child is doing at home and how you think they are performing in school.
- **If your child changes schools, bring the IEP** when enrolling your child in a new school. You can also request that the previous school share your child's IEP with the new school.

Resources and examples

Maine Parent Federation, the state Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), offers support for children with disabilities. Visit their website at www.mpf.org.



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