

Facts for Families

CHILD FIND & REFERRALS October 2022



What is Child Find? It's a law that requires schools to locate, identify, and evaluate any and all students with disabilities.

Child Find is a section of the key special education law in the U.S., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ("IDEA"), which was passed by Congress in 1975.

Overview of the IDEA: [IDEA: The Foundation of Special Education - PAVE](#)

Overview of Child Find
[What Is Child Find? | Understood](#)

Under Child Find, school districts have a duty to locate, identify, and evaluate students who are suspected of having a disability and may be eligible for special education services.

Why was Child Find created? Congress decided that in order for IDEA (our landmark civil rights and special education law) to work, school districts would need to develop effective programs to locate and identify students who might benefit from these new special education services.

Where can I find this law? The Child Find requirements are found in the federal IDEA law (see: [IDEA §1412\(a\)\(3\)](#)), in federal regulations (see: Sec. 300.111), and in the Washington State Administrative Code (see: WAC 392-172A-02040).

What happened next? Once IDEA became law, states and districts became responsible for seeking out and evaluating any child, from birth to age 21, with a known or suspected disability. This legal mandate is called "Child Find."

Do you want to learn more? Here are two in-depth articles on Child Find from our friends at WA PAVE:

[Child Find: Schools Have a Legal Duty to Evaluate Children Impacted by Disability - PAVE](#)

[Toolkit Basics: Where to Begin When a Student Needs More Help - PAVE](#)

Child Find applies to ALL school districts in the US and covers ALL children from birth to age 21, even if they are not currently enrolled in public school.

Who does Child Find apply to? It applies to ALL children who reside within a school district, including children who attend private schools, those who homeschool, highly mobile children, migrant children, homeless children, and children who are wards of the state.

Who coordinates Child Find for school-aged children? In Washington State, the local school districts are responsible for Child Find coordination for ages 3 to 21.

Who coordinates Child Find for infants and toddlers? Child Find for infants and toddlers is coordinated by Washington State's Department of Children, Youth, and Families. If you have concerns about your infant or toddler's development, call the Help Me Grow Washington Hotline at 1-800-322-2588 or visit their website: [Early Support for Infants & Toddlers | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

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Child Find applies EVEN IF a child is receiving passing grades and advancing from grade to grade. It does NOT require a formal diagnosis, a label, or disability classification.

Here are resources from the Issaquah School District on Child Find and referrals, including:

Issaquah's Child Find website: [Childfind - Issaquah School District 411](#)

Issaquah's Special Education Referral website: [Referral for Special Education Evaluation - Issaquah School District 411](#)

Issaquah's Child Find and referral procedures, which are outlined in ISD regulation [#2161P](#). (Please scroll down to the section on "Identification and Referral")

Here are some helpful Washington state specific resources:

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has a page dedicated to Child Find: [OSPI Child Find Site: Child Find | OSPI](#)

Technical guidance from OSPI on Child Find obligations: [OSPI Technical Assistance Paper No. 5 \(Revised\)](#)

The Washington Education Ombuds Office's explanation of Child Find and the special education referral process: [How Does a Student Get Started with Special Education?](#)

Who can make a Child Find referral? Teachers, other district personnel, parents, and other persons with knowledge about a student may refer them for a special education evaluation.

If you suspect your child may have a disability, you or your child's teacher can make a Child Find referral. This is also known as a "request for a special education evaluation."

Who is responsible for making a Child Find referral? Although parents are allowed to request an evaluation, it is ultimately the responsibility of district staff members to identify students in the school setting who might be in need of an evaluation. Teachers can (and should) make Child Find referrals for a struggling

student if they suspect the student might have a disability.

Are you interested in digging deeper? Here are two more articles on Child Find and special education referrals:

Wrightslaw: [The Child Find Mandate: What Does It Mean to You? - Wrightslaw](#)

A Day in Our Shoes: [What is Child Find and what does it have to do with IEPs?](#)

Process: A Child Find referral, or request for a special education evaluation, should be made in writing (email is ok). The district has 25 school days to respond.

What is the process for making a Child Find referral? To make a Child Find referral (also called a request for a special education evaluation), you contact your child's school in writing. We recommend emailing your principal with this request. We also recommend cc'ing the

Assistant Superintendent for Special Services in the Issaquah School District, your child's teacher, and the school psychologist.

What happens next? After making a Child Find referral, the school must respond within 25

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school days. They will approve or deny your request. If the school denies your request, they are supposed to provide you with notice and an explanation in writing (this is called "Prior Written Notice"). If you do not receive this written explanation, it's okay to request it. Sometimes the school holds a "guidance team" meeting to discuss the request. If the school holds a meeting to discuss the referral, parents must be invited to attend.

What should my Child Find referral letter look like? Here are sample referral letters you can use when making your request.

Sample referral letter from OSPI:

<https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/special/data/stateforms/1a-Referral-Form.docx>

Sample referral letter from the Issaquah School District:

<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1640188725/issaquah/ei66tpfqg3mlkpnnte7i/ParentReferralForm-English.pdf>

Sample letter from WA PAVE:

<https://wapave.org/sample-letter-to-request-evaluation/>

Sample letter from the Center for Parent Information and Resources:

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/evaluation-2/>

Denials: While a school must consider a special education referral, it may decide NOT to pursue an evaluation if they believe the child does NOT have a disability.

What if the school says NO to evaluating your child? "If a school district decides the information in the referral does not support the need for an evaluation, it must provide you with a Prior Written Notice letter of its decision not to evaluate. The Prior Written Notice must include the reasons why the district does not believe your student needs to be evaluated. You have the option of challenging the district's decision using one of the dispute resolution options available under special education law and/or inquiring about eligibility under Section 504." (Source: OSPI)

What do I do next? This is a great explanation from Understood.org. 10 Steps to Take If Your Child Is Denied Services | Evaluation Process | Understood

What else can I do? Consider reaching out to OSPI's Special Education Parent Liaison or the Washington State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds. You might also consider hiring a skilled special education advocate or attorney to help you navigate the evaluation process.

Additional resources on Child Find and referrals.

Here are some other helpful videos and podcasts about the Child Find mandate:

Referrals and Evaluations, Video from the Arc of Washington State:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS_IKsruRPA

Child Find, Video from Washington State's Stand for Children: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8E79do_lxBs

Pyramid of Student Rights, Video from WA PAVE:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2XDISfoW1U>

Referrals and the IEP Process, Video from Lisa Lightner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqfUFXmzYLE>

How to Request an Evaluation, Podcast from Understood.Org:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fryc4GpGbq0>