

Navigating the Special Education Process

Parent Handbook

CENTENNIAL BOCES

January 1, 2013

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Purpose

The purpose of this handbook is to foster partnerships between home, school, and the community in providing quality education for students to become productive, contributing members of society. It is intended to be a resource for students, parents, and school staff to assist in understanding and maneuvering through the IEP process.

Explanation of Centennial BOCES

BOCES is an acronym for Board of Cooperative Educational Services. The Colorado legislature authorized the formation of a BOCES in 1965. State law allows a BOCES to be formed by two or more school districts or a school district and a higher educational institution.

Centennial BOCES is funded by participating member and non-member districts and from a combination of specific program grants and contracts from private, state and federal sources. CBOCES exists to provide consolidation of financial and personnel resources to make services available, affordable and comprehensive for each member district.

Centennial BOCES is a "full service" agency, providing a variety of services to our 13-member school districts with approximately 39,000 students. Our service area reaches across a geographical area of 5,853 square miles in Weld, Boulder, Morgan, Adams and Larimer counties. A small example of the services provided include Special Education, Technology Support, Alternative Teacher Licensing Program, Migrant Education and Services, Grant Writing, Early Childhood and Child Find Services, Online Learning, Homeless Education and Support, Student Information Systems, Special Workshops and Initiatives as requested, and much more.

In a broader context CBOCES is divided into 3 distinct focus and service areas. They are: 1) Federal Programs; 2) Professional Development; and 3) Special Education. Although distinct with respect to the focus and function of each service area all areas direct their energies into servicing the needs of our students, families, districts and communities and often overlap in providing resources and services.

The Special Education Process

1. Referral: When a parent or staff member is concerned about a student's progress, a referral may be made to the school's problem solving team. This is not a special education process. The purpose of the problem solving team is to provide a system of ongoing support to those who have concerns about a student. This team will gather available information, review records, and try strategies which may be immediately beneficial to the student. This process is called Response to Intervention or RtI. (Please see following page on RtI). A special education referral is initiated only after implementation of an action plan and appropriate interventions have failed to show adequate progress.

A parent may make a direct referral for special education assessment at any time. When this occurs, the special education multidisciplinary team at the student’s school of attendance must formally consider the referral. The team will consider the educational relevance and determine if there is sufficient supporting data to move forward with a formal special education evaluation.

2. Evaluation or Assessment: Individual evaluations are given to your child after receiving your written permission. The assessments are conducted by special education personnel in the possible areas of health, communication, academic functioning, psychological, social, motor, and life- skills, using both formal and informal tests. The results of these assessments are used in determining eligibility for special education services and assist in educational planning.

3. Initial Meeting: An initial meeting is held to determine if a student is eligible for special education services. Parents, special education personnel, teachers, administrators, student (when appropriate), and other involved persons participate in a conference reviewing the assessment results and sharing pertinent information. If the student is found to be in need of special services, a program is developed. A parent’s written permission is required to initiate special education services.

4. Individual Education Program (IEP)

Every student with a disability receiving Special Education or related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is an education plan tailor-made to suit the student’s individual needs to gain access to general education. If the staffing team decides that a student is not eligible for services through special education, recommendations will be made to parents and teachers regarding various ways to help the student.

4. Provision of Services: The special education team will recommend the types of special education services that might be most appropriate to meet the educational needs of your child. Students are served in their home schools and participate in regular education classes whenever possible, this is also known as “Least Restrictive Environment” (LRE). Other options are considered if a student needs a more specialized placement.

5. Review: The IEP is reviewed once a year or more often if necessary. At least once every three years, a Triennial IEP meeting is held to determine continued eligibility for special education. Assessments are part of the re-determination process.

Disability Categories

In the state of Colorado a child qualifies for special education services by meeting criteria in one or more of the following disability categories. The disability must prevent the child from receiving reasonable educational benefit from general education alone.

Speech/Language Disability – A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child’s education.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD) – A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell or do mathematical calculations.

Intellectual Disability – A child with reduced general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.

Emotional Disability – A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

- a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Hearing Disability – A deficiency in hearing sensitivity as demonstrated by an elevated threshold of auditory sensitivity to pure tones or speech where, even with the help of amplification, the child is prevented from receiving reasonable educational benefit.

Vision Disability – A deficiency in visual acuity and/or visual field and/or visual performance where, even with the use of lenses or corrective devices, he/she is prevented from receiving reasonable educational benefit from regular education.

Other Health Impaired – A sustained illness (a prolonged, abnormal condition requiring continued monitoring characterized by limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems) or disabling physical condition which prevents a child from receiving reasonable educational benefit from general education alone.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) – An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.

Autism – A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.

Deaf-Blind Disability – Simultaneous hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

Multiple Disability – Two or more areas of significant impairment, one of which shall be a cognitive impairment except in the case of deaf-blindness. Cognitive impairment shall mean significant limited intellectual capacity. Other areas of significant impairment include: physical, visual, auditory, communicative, or emotional. The combination of such impairments creates a unique condition that is evidenced through a multiplicity of needs which prevent the child from receiving reasonable educational benefit from regular education alone.

Preschool Child with a Disability – Children younger than 6 years of age that may have delays in one or more developmental areas. Children are evaluated before they are 6 years of age to determine whether they met the criteria of a specific disability.

Response to Intervention (RtI) and Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Special education multidisciplinary teams identify students with learning disabilities by considering a student's response to scientifically based interventions offered first by general education as an essential part of a full and individual evaluation for special education services. This aligns with a national and state school reform effort called Response to Intervention (RTI). A special education referral is initiated only after implementation of an action plan and appropriate interventions have failed to show adequate progress.

There are 8 areas of focus that the special education team will look at when determining the specific needs of student when SLD is suspected. Those 8 areas are: Written Expression, Listening Comprehension, Math Calculation, Oral Expression, Math Problem solving, Reading Comprehension, Reading Fluency, and Basic Reading. If a student is not making adequate achievement or progress in any one of these areas despite instructional intervention a team will meet to determine the possibility of specific learning disability (SLD).

Multidisciplinary Team Roles

Audiologist: Provide Special Education assessment, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process, establishing interventions and strategies that reduce barriers to communication and learning and encourage positive social-emotional development and self-advocacy skills. Audiologists determine and validate amplification and other technology needs to maximize student learning.

Speech-Language Pathologist: Provide Special Education assessment, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process, the ways in which learning takes place and the appropriate levels of intellectual, social/communication and emotional development occur with the student. SLP's provide specialized instruction and oversee the implementation of strategies that draws on the results of student assessments and is aligned to academic standards and advances student levels of concepts, content knowledge and skills.

Occupational Therapists: Provide Special Education assessment, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process, the ways in which learning takes place with respect to function and mobility in the student’s environment and provides supports in the classroom that promote a predictable, accessible learning environment in the classroom and/or school in which each student can maximize their potential and develop skill level.

School Nurses: Provide Special Education assessment and medical/health history, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process (relevant to health and education, etc. School nurses collect and analyze comprehensive data pertinent to the student’s health and for situations to determine nursing/medical diagnosis, potential issues and accommodate for health needs. Nurses help to create an environment that maximizes and facilitate positive and healthy learning for students.

Physical Therapists: Provide Special Education assessment, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process, and develop Plan of Care and service delivery methods and intervention strategies to promote achievement of student goals and integrate/utilize appropriate adaptive equipment to achieve student goals. PT’s provide proactive, clear and constructive feedback to families about student progress.

School Social Workers: Provide Special Education assessment and social/emotional history, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process, refer for resources, empower students and families to gain access to and effectively use formal and informal community resources, consult with Spec. Ed. Team about any concerns from the student family that may address relevant concerns for the student/family, testing and serving as a conduit between school and home. SSW’s support and/or establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for the student and promote parent involvement for their student.

School Psychologists: Provide Special Education Assessment, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process, the ways in which learning takes place and develop interventions and strategies that reduce barriers to learning. School Psych’s test and analyze the student’s learning development and growth and apply the data to create strategies/interventions in the creation of the IEP plan, i.e., goals and progress monitoring on an ongoing basis and work to maximize the student’s full potential in meeting their needs in accordance to Colorado’s academic standard and ensure both legal and ethical standard for the student/family.

Resource Teacher: Provide Special Education assessment, advocate on behalf of the student/family in the IEP process, educating parents on the IEP process, provide lesson planning and consistent delivery of instruction that draws on results of student assessments from the IEP Team and ensures alignment and delivery of these services in the classroom that meet Colorado’s academic standard in content, knowledge acquisition and skill development. Resource Teachers also provide for ongoing monitoring and feedback for the student in meeting the established

goals and are often the professionals making day to day assessments about each goal and consulting with the appropriate team member with regard to concerns or issues that may arise.

Cultural Mediator: Provides interpretive services/resources, advocacy and education to the student/parent/guardian relevant to the Special Education Process. At times functions as the initial contact person for the student/family and works collaboratively with a professional or the IEP team members in assessing home environment, communicating needs, concerns and observances relevant to the student's needs, etc. Cultural Mediator may function as a conduit between the home and school when scheduling evaluations and meetings. Additional assignments may include translation of written documents/notices at all phases of the IEP process.

The Rights of Parents and Children who qualify for an IEP under the IDEA

If your child qualifies for an Individualized Education Program, it is important that you are aware of the following rights:

A Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): In Colorado, every child who is eligible for Special Education is guaranteed a public education at no cost to her/his parents. This public education must be appropriate to the needs of the child.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): All children with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment. This means that they must receive instruction in the most "normal" setting possible while still meeting their educational needs. The IEP team will collaborate to ensure that the child receiving special education services will be educated with their peers in a general education classroom as much as possible.

Individual Education Program (IEP): Every child receiving Special Education or related service must have an Individualized Education Program. All children receiving Special Education or related services must have an Individualized Education Program. This is an educational plan created by the child's IEP team to address the child's individual learning needs. Assessments must be administered in the child's native language, and test instruments may not contain cultural, racial, or ethnic bias. Valid and reliable tests that allow a student to demonstrate actual abilities are required. Parents are welcome to contribute outside evaluation information.

Extended School Year (ESY): ESY Services are intended to meet the needs of Special Education students who may lose previously taught skills (regression) and/or may take an unusually long period of time to regain these skills (recoupment). ESY is not intended to function as traditional summer school. It is not intended for learning new skills and it is not a way to make for instruction lost due to absences. ESY is to ensure that FAPE, (Free Appropriate Public Education), remains in effect by helping students maintain the skills they learned during the school year.

Confidentiality: All information in a student's Special Education file is viewed as protected information and will not be shared inappropriately or without consent of parents or legal guardians.

What if there is a problem? There may be times while or child is receiving special education support that you have serious concern about something that is happening or not happening at school regarding the implementation of your child's Individualized Special Education Program. Centennial BOCES will make every effort to work with you to resolve specific concerns that you may have regarding your child receiving special education services.

While your legal rights are described in the Parent and Child Rights in Special Education handbook, we encourage you to approach the problem in one of the following ways first. It is best for all involved (especially the student) to make every effort to resolve issues at the lowest level possible. The following steps provide a guide to resolve issues at the lowest level possible:

1. Talk to the teacher or service provider in person or on telephone. Emailing the service provider or writing a note can also be helpful.
2. If the teacher or service provider cannot help you, contact the principal of the school.
3. Ask for a meeting with one or more of the people suggested in step #2 above.
4. You may contact the School Social Worker assigned to your child's school.
5. If the above suggestions do not resolve the problem, contact the Director of Special Education.

Mediation: You might disagree with the Special Education testing, services, or placement for your child. You can try to resolve your disagreements by requesting mediation, which is a free service. A mediator is a neutral person not employed by the school district who assists you and the school in resolving differences. You may also request a due process hearing. Please have the school explain the process before you make a final decision.

What Parents Should Expect to Review at IEP Meetings

Here are some examples of possible agendas that will be followed at the identified IEP meeting for your child.

Initial IEP Meeting Agenda

- A. Eligibility Determination
 - 1. Introductions, purpose and format of the meeting
 - 2. Procedural Safeguards, Rights and Responsibilities
 - 3. Evaluation Report Discussion
 - 4. Determination of Disability-the IEP meeting stops here if the student is ineligible for special education services
- B. Consent for Services
 - 1. Prior Notice of Special Education Action
- C. IEP Meeting
 - 1. Prior Notice and Consent for Initial Provision of Special Education and Related Services
 - 2. Procedural Safeguards, Rights and Responsibilities (if IEP meeting is separate from the Eligibility meeting)
 - 3. Signatures of Participants (must match Notice of Meeting attendees)
 - 4. Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance
 - 5. Determination of Special Factors-Required plans
 - 6. Determination of Post-School Goals and Transition Needs
 - 7. Annual Goals and Objectives
 - 8. Accommodations and Modifications, ESY, State Assessments
 - 9. Determination of Service Delivery
 - 10. Determination of Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Annual review IEP Meeting Agenda

- A. IEP Meeting
 - 1. Introductions, Purpose of the Meeting
 - 2. Procedural Safeguards, Rights and Responsibilities
 - 3. Signatures of Participants (must match Notice of Meeting attendees)
 - 4. Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (including annual Transition Assessment if age appropriate)
 - 5. Determination of Special Factors-Required Plans
 - 6. Determination of Post-School Goals and Transition Needs (if age appropriate)
 - 7. Annual Goals and Objectives
 - 8. Accommodations and Modifications, Extended School Year, State Assessments
 - 9. Determination of Service Delivery
 - 10. Determination of Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Triennial IEP Meeting Agenda

A. Eligibility Determination

1. Introductions, purpose and format of the meeting
2. Procedural Safeguards, Rights and Responsibilities
3. Evaluation Report Discussion (if determined appropriate by the team)
4. Determination of Disability-the IEP meeting stops here if the student is ineligible for special education services

B. IEP Meeting

1. Signatures of Participants (must match Notice of Meeting attendees)
2. Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (including annual Transition Assessment information if age appropriate)
3. Determination of Special Factors-Required Plans
4. Determination of Post-School Goals and Transition Needs (if age appropriate)
5. Annual Goals and Objectives
6. Accommodations and Modifications, ESY, State Assessments
7. Determination of Service Delivery
8. Determination of Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Accommodations and Modifications

Accommodations are practices and procedures that provide equitable access during instruction and assessment for students who have a documented need, including students with disabilities. Use of accommodations helps to ensure that ALL students have a fair and equal chance to receive standard-based instruction and demonstrate mastery. Accommodations do not change the grade-level achievement standard or assessment.

Accommodations: are the “HOW”.

Special educators and related service providers consider unique instructional accommodation/strategies a child may require, such as small group instruction, frequent practice and repetition, use of different materials, reduction of sensory information, etc. They also consider accommodations in timing/scheduling setting, format/equipment, presentation of directions, or recording/response accommodations. For example, a student with difficulty reading may need to take a test orally; another student may need additional time or may be exempted from large-class testing. The decision to use a particular accommodation with a student is made on an individual basis through the IEP process.

Modifications: are the “What”

If a student meets the criteria of a significant cognitive disability they may receive a modified curriculum. A modification reflects a change/adjustment in content, rigor, and requires a standard based IEP for instruction. Modifications change what the student is expected to learn and the academic achievement standard by which the student is evaluated.

Ideas for Parents: Before, During, and After an IEP meeting

Before:

1. Review the current IEP document
2. Review IEP goals and objectives and progress reports
3. Decide on at least one or two specific outcomes you would like your child to achieve in the next school year
4. Review the Notice of the IEP meeting.
 - A. Are the date, time and place agreeable? If not, call the school and offer several alternatives.
 - B. Identify the purpose of the meeting. If you are unsure, call the school and ask for clarification.
5. Decide whether to invite anyone to attend the IEP meeting with you and inform to school. You may invite anyone with knowledge or special expertise regarding your child.

During:

1. Be on time.
2. Make sure that you understand who is present and why.
3. What are the proper issues for the IEP Team to address?
 - A. Eligibility
 - B. Changes to goals and objectives
 - C. Changes in related services: Assistive Technology, Speech/Language, OT/PT, Audiology, Nursing, or Transportation
 - D. Changes in placement
 - E. Changes to the Behavior Intervention Plan
4. Practice active listening.
5. Don't interrupt and expect the same courtesy.
6. Remain calm. Take a short break if necessary.
7. Read or listen to the review of the IEP documents. Make corrections as necessary.
8. Obtain a copy of the IEP. The school must provide a copy at no cost to the parent.

After:

1. File the IEP documents in an accessible place-use a file folder or three-ring binder to store and organize IEP information.

2. Acknowledge good work by school staff.
3. Present a united collaborative relationship with the school to your child.
4. Share concerns as soon as they arise at the lowest level possible. If you are not satisfied with the result, meet with the next person up the chain of command.
5. Be aware that you can request another meeting if needed.

Helpful Hints from Parents to Parents

The following are tips on attending meetings to discuss your child's Individual Education Program (IEP). You are an integral part of these meetings. You or the school may initiate a conference, which should be held at a time mutually convenient for both you and school personnel.

- Remember to work together as a team. Change can take time, please be patient.
- Check the information you already have about your child. Is there something you do not understand regarding the IEP or the special education services that your child receives?
- Jot down questions that you have before and during the meeting-list main concerns about your child and the special education services that they are receiving.
- You have the right to see all school records, files, and other materials that pertain to your child.
- You may want to set up an informal meeting with the school to discuss methods, purpose, and intended results to any assessment before the assessment is completed.
- "Two heads are better than one." Bring your spouse, a friend who knows your child or is there simply to give you moral support or someone who has valuable knowledge of your child's educational needs.
- If you do not understand something that is said, ask to have it explained to you.
- Your child's progress must be reviewed with you at an annual review meeting. You will receive a copy of the review.
- Expect progress reports from your child's educational team as often as the school sends out progress reports.
- Remember, you have the right to ask questions during an conference or at a later date.
- Remember that teachers and school personnel are people. Let them know you appreciate the work they do with your child.
- Keep all your child's IEPs, progress reports and educational information in a folder or binder you can easily refer to.

RESOURCE GUIDE

Educational Services

Centennial BOCES (970) 352-7404
2020 Clubhouse Dr.
Greeley, CO 80634

Centennial BOCES (970) 867-8297
821 W. Platte Ave.
Fort Morgan, CO 80701

Colorado Department of Education (303) 866-6600

Legal Services:

Legal Center for People with Disabilities and Older People 800-288-1376

Steve Owens 720-529-9800
6041 So Syracuse Way Suite 103
Greenwood village, Co. 80111
Steve@mydenverlawyer.com

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Centennial Mental Health Center (970) 867-4924
910 East Railroad Ave.
Fort Morgan, CO 80701

Northern Behavioral Health Center

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Colorado Division of Vocation Rehab. (970) 522-3737
100 College Ave.
Sterling, CO 80751

School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) (970) 867-8297 x 3124
821 W. Platte Ave.
Fort Morgan, CO 80701

School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) (970) 352-7404
2020 Clubhouse Dr.
Greeley, CO 80634

DISABILITY SERVICES

Eastern Colorado Services for the Developmentally Disabled, Inc.
911 E. Burlington Ave (970)867-3506
Fort Morgan, CO 80701

Envision

Medicaid Waiver Program for Children (extensive waiver)
970-226-2345

Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) 866-336-7385

Parent to Parent (P2P) of Colorado
2200 S. Jasmine Street 877-472-7201
Denver, CO 80222
www.p2p-co.org

PEAK Parent Center, Inc. 1-800-284-0251
6055 Lehman Drive Suite 101
Colo. Springs, CO 80918 TDD (719) 530-9403

ARC of Colorado 1-800-333-7690
777 Grant Street Suite 303
Denver, CO 80203

Parents Encouraging Parents (PEP) (303)566-6846
Colo. Department of Education-ESS-PEP
201 East Colfax Ave. Room 305
Denver, CO 80203
www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/PEP.asp

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