



What Is Special Education?

Special education is one part of a continuum of support available to students and includes specially designed instruction and related services, provided at no cost to families, to meet the unique needs of eligible students with disabilities.

The Law That Protects Your Child

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that makes sure children with disabilities get the education they need. Tennessee also follows state Board of Education Rules. Under this law:

- **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** - A child has the right to receive special education and related services at no cost to their family. The services must be based on the student's individual needs and provided through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that is designed to help the student learn, participate in school, and make meaningful progress.
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** — Your child must be educated with students without disabilities as much as possible.
- **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** — A written plan created just for your child that describes their goals, services, and supports.
- **Prior Written Notice (PWN)** — The school must notify you in writing before making changes to your child's identification, evaluation, placement, or services.
- **Procedural Safeguards** — You have legal rights that protect your child's education. The school must give you a copy at least once per year.

Who Can Qualify for Special Education?

Tennessee recognizes 16 disability categories. A child may receive special education if they:

- **Have one of these disabilities:** autism, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, other health impairment, or developmental delay (through age 9).