



Sand Hill School
at Children's Health Council

Sand Hill School Transition Guidebook

2015-2016



Sand Hill School www.sandhillschool.org

Children's Health Council www.chconline.org

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Is my child ready to transition?

Transitioning from Sand Hill School

The goal of Sand Hill School is to help your child develop the building blocks necessary for a successful transition to a more traditional classroom. The transition process at Sand Hill School begins from the moment of admission and continues until your child is placed in a new school. The number of years your child spends at Sand Hill depends upon their personal challenges, their responsiveness to our program and the availability of other school placements that meet their needs.

Sand Hill School's approach represents a systematic process to build fundamental skills for long-term success. Once your child develops these skills and builds confidence, Sand Hill School provides a transition program as a special benefit to all our families. Deciding on just when your child should transition is a school/family decision that is both art and science and involves a number of critical factors:

- Following a transition timeline
- Development of fundamental skills and confidence
- Family needs and desires
- Selecting and applying to a private or public school

Sand Hill support with the transition process

Ultimately, the transition decision is yours. We provide support so you can make the best decision for you and your family. Parents, teachers and specialists will work together to determine both when your child is ready to transition and what kind of environment would be most supportive. Sand Hill School administration has relationships with many private schools in the area and will actively support the transition process for your child.

Sand Hill School transition support includes:

- Counseling with Sand Hill staff to determine transition readiness
- The Sand Hill School Transition Guidebook (also available online)
- School placement support and information provided by the Transition Coordinator
- School visits
- Preparing child for interview

What is the timeline for the transition process?

You should plan on beginning your process approximately 18 months before transition to the new school will occur. So, for example, if a child is going to a new school in Fall of 2017, the transition process listed below would begin in January of 2016.

Annual Transition Meeting

January (All parents should attend this meeting twice—once in your first year at Sand Hill and again 18 months before transition.)

- Parent Questionnaire
- Overview of Transition Program

Transition Meeting

Spring

- Navigating public and private schools

Spring Parent Conference (over one year before expected transition)

- Discuss possible transition
- Discuss progress to date
- Discuss focus areas that need to be accomplished in the upcoming year for a successful transition
- Teachers alert Transition Coordinator
- Transition Coordinator contacts parents

Summer

- Parents and Transition Coordinator work together to identify schools
- Parents register for appropriate testing (ISEE, SSAT, etc.) including accommodations
- Parents begin reviewing school websites gathering information (such as Open House dates) and noting any questions

Fall Parent Conference

- Personalized Plan for Transition is confirmed
- Parents confirm to which schools their child will apply
- Teachers alert Transition Coordinator
- Transition Coordinator contacts parents (attends parent conference if available)

October-December

- Attend appropriate school Open Houses/Tours
- Complete applications (provide appropriate portion of school application to Transition Coordinator with at least 4 weeks lead time)
- Finalize all details for testing
- Prepare student for testing (test-taking strategies)
- Prepare student for successful shadow/interview experience

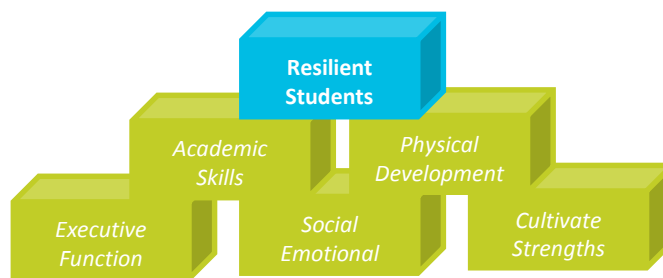
January

- Make sure that all parts of application are completed and turned in

March

- Mid-March admission decisions are made

What fundamental skills are critical to a successful transition?



The foundational building blocks of the Sand Hill School place strong emphasis on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Executive Functioning (EF). There is a growing body of research indicating that SEL is the best indicator of lifelong success, and even academic success. Developing important social emotional awareness and skills are the most important factors in determining transition readiness for our students (see items blue).

Executive Function Skills	Social Emotional Learning	Identify & Cultivate Strengths	Academic Skills	Physical Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inhibition of impulses Making transitions Emotional control Initiation Working memory Planning & organization Organization of Materials 	<p>Self Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify & recognize emotions Accurate self perception Recognize strengths & challenges Self efficacy <p>Social Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective taking Empathy Appreciate diversity Respect for others <p>Responsible Decision-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify problem & analyze situation Problem solving Evaluation & reflection Personal & ethical responsibility <p>Self Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control impulses Manage stress Motivate self Discipline Set goals Organize <p>Relationship Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication, social engagement Build relationships Work cooperatively Conflict management Seeks & provides help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify interests and affinities as a pathway to developing strengths Stimulate imagination through creative play Model positive attitudes and positive approaches to life Provide different ways for the student to express learning 	<p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phonemic Awareness Phonics Fluency Vocabulary Comprehension <p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idea generation Organization Voice Sentence fluency Word choice Conventions <p>Math</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and Operations Geometry Measurement Data & Probability Algebraic thinking 	<p>Support student development in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Body & spatial awareness Locomotor skills Directionality Stretching Muscular strength & endurance Cardiovascular endurance Rhythm & timing Balance Small & large object manipulation Tossing & catching Coordination Flexibility Agility Throwing for accuracy & distance Dribbling, passing, kicking, volleying Movement Motor control

What factors should our family consider before we select a school?

You've probably learned a lot about the characteristics of a good school during your stay at Sand Hill School—small classes, dedicated teachers, an atmosphere where your child is accepted and supported, an engaging program. As you begin the search for a transition school, what else should you think about?

Obviously, your child's needs come first, but you may have some wishes as well. It's a good idea to sit down with the family and make a list and then decide which items are absolutely essential. This will help you when you visit new schools and will make the search seem less daunting. The National Council for Learning Disabilities (www.nclld.org) offers these words of helpful advice and direction:

Practical Matters

- *Do you need a school that offers after-hours childcare or an extended day program?*
- *Is location of the school important? Can you drive your child or arrange for other transportation if buses aren't available?*
- *Are you considering a private school? If so, what are your family's financial requirements? (Remember that most private schools offer scholarships.)*

Academic Program

- *Will your child learn better in a traditional, back-to-the-basics curriculum? Or will your child be more successful with a collaborative, noncompetitive approach; project- or theme-based learning; hands-on teaching?*
- *What special learning assistance does your child require? Does your child need tutors, a resource room, classroom aides, assistive technology, small classes, teachers licensed in special education? Do regular classroom teachers need to be knowledgeable about both their subject matter and learning disabilities?*
- *Does your child need flexible scheduling to allow for extended time and other accommodations?*
- *Is it important to see opportunities for students with learning disabilities to demonstrate their strengths?*
- *How important to you are a school's test scores?*
- *Are you looking for a rigorous curriculum that includes opportunities for gifted children and for Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs—and a school that makes these opportunities accessible to children with learning disabilities?*

School Facilities and Culture

- *How important is cutting-edge technology — wired classrooms, laptops, smart boards, and so on?*
- *Which extracurricular opportunities are important to your child's happiness? (If necessary, can you arrange those activities outside school?)*
- *How important are facilities like a modern building, wireless Internet access, playing fields, a gym, an auditorium?*
- *What kind of environment would be best for your child? Which are most important: diversity among students and teachers, recognition and display of all students' achievements, firm discipline policy, school's philosophy or mission, a conflict-resolution program, an anti-bullying initiative?*

- *Which opportunities for parent involvement are most attractive to you? For example, would you like an active PTA or PTO, volunteer opportunities, a well-established parent communication system (e.g., newsletters, web-based programs, regular and easy contact with teachers), the expectation that parents will be deeply involved in their children's education?*

Top of the List: Your Child's Needs

What your child needs from school is probably more important than any other factor. Consider what you know about how your child learns best, what her or his major learning challenges are, any social issues that get in your child's way, your child's interests and passions, and teaching techniques or strategies that help your child succeed. If you are transferring your child from another school (rather than looking for a preschool or kindergarten), talk with teachers and administrators who know your child best. It's also crucial to talk with other parents of children with learning disabilities, both at your current school and at other schools. How satisfied are they with their child's school?

How do I select a school that is appropriate for my child?

Each student at Sand Hill School experiences a range of learning challenges. So skill levels and educational needs vary widely. We believe there is a school for every student, but not one school for everyone. The types of schools to which our students transition depend on the student's academic development, independence and ability to apply the strategies and tools learned at Sand Hill School. These include SEL strategies, executive functioning tools, self advocacy and the ability to be an active learner. See Appendix, page 20, for the *Sand Hill School Transition Questionnaire*. It's a great way to spark thinking about transition.

There are many online resources available to help with guidelines for selecting an appropriate school. We recommend the site called Great Schools, www.greatschools.org. The information below is reprinted from that site.

Focus on the Four Fit Factors (resource: Great Schools website)

Fortunately, we can focus on a limited number of characteristics that affect how well children fare in different kinds of school environments. We developed this targeted list by scanning the research about child development and by talking with parents of many different kinds of children about their children's needs. From all of that information, we organized the many characteristics of children into four easy-to-grasp categories: the four Fit Factors. These Fit Factors are simply a way of sorting out your child's (and later, your family's) many features in a way useful for identifying your school needs. The four Fit Factors for children include:

- **What Your Child Learns:** *These are aspects of your child that affect what subjects and at what level of difficulty your child should be taught at school. These include your child's Basic Learning Capability, other capabilities, and interests.*
- **How Your Child Learns:** *These are aspects of your child that affect how a school should teach and interact with your child both in and outside of the classroom. These include your child's learning styles, motivation, physical and mental health challenges, behavior challenges, learning disabilities and disorders, and self-understanding.*
- **Social Issues:** *This includes the need for social contact with particular friends from the child's perspective.*
- **Practical Matters:** *This includes essential extracurricular activities that may be compelling choice factors for some children.*

Prioritizing Your Child's Needs

The four Fit Factors help you by taking the jumble of characteristics that define your child and funneling them down into a manageable set. Not every Fit Factor characteristic is important for matching every child to the right school. You'll need to decide which ones are really important for your child. Most children will have only a small number of characteristics that are top priorities for selecting a school. Identify these, and you can focus on finding a truly Great Fit school for your child's top needs. Add to this key questions about [your family's top needs](#) and school academic quality, and you will be ready to pick a great school that fits.

What does a good school look like?

Support at schools varies widely so it is important to carefully consider the needs of your child as you consider different schools. Here's a handy checklist of characteristics and questions. You may also want to use *Visiting A School Worksheet: What to Ask, What to Look For*, located in the Appendix, page 22.

Characteristics to look for

- Desirable class size (most Sand Hill students will likely be more successful in a smaller class)
- Desirable school size
- Instructional methods and philosophy that support learning differences
- Progress report system (report cards, etc.)
- Structure (routines, predictability) vs. unstructured (more student independence, less direct teacher guidance)
- A positive atmosphere
- Use of technology for learning
- Diversity (learning, ethnic, etc.)
- Tuition and financial aid
- Coed/all boys/all girls
- Location and commute time
- Availability of before and after school care/programs
- Special programs included for all students (sports, visual arts, performing arts)
- Proximity to public transportation
- Learning specialist support

Questions to ask prospective schools

- What is the school's philosophy regarding instruction and how students learn?
- What type of support does your school have for kids with learning differences?
- Does the school have a learning specialist on staff? Full time? Part time?
- Are teachers able to provide accommodations for students?
- How is technology used to support learning?
- What is the class size for my child's grade level?
- What is the student/teacher ratio?
- What is the homework policy?
- How is progress reported?
- What special programs does the school have? (sports, visual arts, performing arts, other)
- How are parents involved at the school? Is there a parent teacher organization?
- What is the daily schedule for my child's grade level?
- What is the school calendar?
- How do you think your current parents would describe your school to prospective parents?
- How do you think your teachers would describe your school and their students?

Should we select private school or public school?

Choosing a school with the best fit for your child is what is most important, a school where your child feels accepted and supported and where there are services to support success. Here are some comparisons of private and public schools.

	Private Schools	Public Schools
Admission	There is an admissions process for private schools that usually starts with an inquiry and includes an application, shadow experience, child interview, teacher recommendation and more. The admissions process is designed to determine whether or not there is a match between your child's learning needs and their environment. The length of the admissions process varies from school to school.	The public school your child can attend is usually the one in your neighborhood. All you need to do is visit the school and complete the enrollment forms. There is no selection process as all students have a right to an education in the U.S.
Students	The student population at a private school is determined through a selection process. Students at private schools tend to have similar goals and interests.	The student population at a public school usually reflects the neighborhood in which it resides. There is usually a diversity of student backgrounds, learning styles and needs.
Teachers	Teachers in private schools are not required to have a valid teaching credential, although many private schools prefer credentialed teachers. However, private school teachers often have a graduate degree in a specific area of specialization (i.e. special ed, reading, etc.).	All teachers in public schools must have a valid teaching credential. The credentialing process varies depending on the state, but there is usually some training and coursework beyond undergraduate classes that one must complete.
Special Needs	Many private schools do not have a lot of support for students who learn differently. However, student diversity is a goal in many private schools. Private schools usually will admit the students they know they can serve well. Sometimes private schools have programs for students with special needs but they may be at an additional cost.	A public school is required to educate every child that enrolls. Public schools are also mandated to meet every child's needs, which means that they have special education programs and special education teachers. Many public schools also have programs for advanced or gifted students as well.
Class Size	Class size at public schools vary, but many private schools are able to offer small class sizes in comparison to public schools which becomes a compelling reason to choose a private school for your child.	Public schools recognize the value of small class sizes, but most districts do not have the financial resources to keep the class size small. In the upper grades, class size tends to increase.

How does Sand Hill help with private school application?

What Sand Hill does to support your application to the new school

- We provide one copy of each of the following to each school you apply to:
 - Learning Recommendations form (completed by current teachers)
 - Current AIMSWeb benchmark data regarding reading and math
 - Learning Summary (completed by current teachers and summarizes learning in reading, writing, math, social emotional learning and executive functioning)
- We establish relationships with private schools and public school districts through our area. We can reach out to a specific school as needed.
- We will complete the school portion of your child's private school application. Please provide at least four weeks lead time for this, as this will allow us to respond thoughtfully.
- We hold transition meetings during the school year to support you and answer questions as you complete the admissions process at each school.
- We will help prepare your child for the shadow/interview process.
- We will help prepare your child for the standardized testing required by most private schools.

Information about preparing for the shadow/interview process

Plan to talk with your child ahead of time, before he/she actually visits the school and/or shadows. We will also help to prepare the child here at school. Before the shadow/interview, the child should:

- Review the school's website for basic information (depending on the age of your child, you might be facilitating this review).
- Talk with your child about why he is interested in the school and ask him questions such as, "Why do you think you want to go to this school?" and encourage him to thoughtfully articulate his response to you as practice.
- Make sure that your child dresses appropriately for the shadow/interview.
- Send a thank you note after the shadow/interview experience.

During the shadow/interview, your child should remember the following guidelines:

- Be courteous, interested and open with the teacher and/or administrator with whom you are talking.
- Be courteous, interested and kind with your peers while at the school.
- Use expected and positive behavior during the shadow/interview experience.

PLEASE NOTE: *While it is important to be prepared for the shadow/interview experience, it is important that the child's responses do not feel scripted. Teachers and administrators are looking for potential students who show some creativity and a spark of individuality that provides a window into the child's personality. We will help to prepare your child for this experience, but it is also helpful for you to talk informally with your child about their interests strengths and challenges so that they are ready to articulate that to a teacher or administrator.*

Information about entrance assessments for private schools ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam)

Most private schools require a test called Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE). Some private schools require that students complete this test as part of the admissions process for grades 5 and above. Other private schools require the ISEE below grade 5. It is important to know what the private school to which you are applying requires.

If you are considering transition, it is important to register for the ISEE testing in the summer. In doing so, you will have more options regarding testing locations that provide accommodations.

Our students receive instruction in test-taking strategies in preparation for taking this type of standardized test. You can find out more information about the ISEE online at:

erblearn.org/parents/admission/isee

Locations

When you visit the ISEE website, you can also access a list of locations that are administering the ISEE.

Testing Accommodations

You must apply at least five weeks prior to the testing date for accommodations. This requires completing a form and a letter from the school (in this case Sand Hill School). You can request accommodations such as extended time, use of a calculator and circling in the test booklet. PLEASE NOTE that only select locations can provide accommodations, so make sure that you take that into consideration when you are reviewing the testing locations.

Also, many testing locations can become full so it is important to register as early as possible.

SSAT (Secondary School Admission Test)

The SSAT is a norm-referenced, standardized test that is required at many independent schools, including high schools. The SSAT measures the basic verbal, quantitative, and reading skills students develop over time. It is important to register early for this test, especially if you are requesting accommodations. You can find out more online at www.ssat.org.

What are some of the private school options in our area?

School	Grade levels	School size	Class size or Ratio	Student profile	SEL	Learning support
Bowman Int'l School Palo Alto	K-8	225	Low teacher/stu ratio	Self directed learner	No evidence	No evidence
Carey San Mateo	PreK-5	250	10:1	Able to handle more rigorous academic program	No evidence	Little
Fusion San Mateo	6-12	N/A	1:1	Individualized	No evidence	High
Gideon Hausner Palo Alto	K-8	405	Gr 1-5=24 Gr 6-8=18	Jewish	No evidence	Moderate
Girls Middle School Palo Alto	6-8	200	18	All girls; non sectarian	Strong	No evidence
Helios Sunnyvale	K-5 (expanding to K-8)	47	10:1 ratio	Gifted (qualitative assessment)	Some	None
Hillbrook Los Gatos	JK-8	315	18 1:8	Independent, motivated learners	Strong	Moderate evidence
Keys Palo Alto	K-8	315	18	Independent, motivated learners	Moderate	Moderate
Los Altos Christian Los Altos	Preschool-8	200				Strong
Lydian Menlo Park	6-12		1:1	Individualized	No evidence	High
Menlo School Atherton	6-12	MS 219 HS 576	18 11:1	Strong academic	Some	Moderate
Mulberry School Los Gatos	JK-5	140	8:1	Independent, motivated learners	Moderate	No evidence

School	Grade levels	School size	Class size or Ratio	Student profile	SEL	Learning support
Nativity Menlo Park	K-8	269	23:1	Traditional, high academic	Moderate	Moderate
Odyssey San Mateo	6-8		16/gr level	Academically gifted	No evidence	None
Phillips Brooks Menlo Park	Preschool-5	276		Independent, motivated learners	Strong	Moderate
Pinewood Los Altos	K-12		3-6=18 7-12=12			
Redeemer Lutheran School RWC	K-8	214	24	Academic focus	No evidence	Little
Sacred Heart Schools Atherton	Preschool-12	1180	24	Independent learners, academic rigor	No evidence	Moderate
St. Matthews Episcopal San Mateo	Preschool-8	230 growing to 350	17	Confident, strong academic	Strong	Some
Sea Crest HMB	K-8	270	16 10:1	Constructivist, individualized	Strong	No evidence
Serendipity School Belmont	K-5	125	15-20	Differentiated instruction		
Sierra Santa Clara	K-12		20 10:1	Academic focus, but individualized to student's needs	No evidence	Moderate
Sterne School SF	5-12	86		Strengths-based; students with learning differences	No evidence	Strong
Synapse Menlo	K-8	115		Gifted, Project-based,	Moderate	None

School	Grade levels	School size	Class size or Ratio	Student profile	SEL	Learning support
Park				constructivist		
Trinity Menlo Park	JK-5		20	Academic rigor, self discovery	Some	No evidence
Ventana Los Altos	Preschool-gr. 5	150	Small	Creative, inquisitive, self-directed learners	Strong	No evidence
Wilkinson HMB	JK-8	150	20	Academic focus with individualization	Some	Little
Woodland Portola Valley	JK-8	240	15	Independent learners; emphasis on academics and character development	Some	None
Woodside Priory Woodside	6-12		18	Avg to abv avg; hard workers; rigorous academics	Some	Moderate
Wornick Foster City	K-8	215	K-5 12:1 6-8 20:1	Critical thinkers, problem solvers, STEM emphasis		

What about transitioning to a public school?

Even though you may prefer a placement in a private school, openings are not always available. Public schools are always your back up option. If you decide to pursue placement in public school, your child will need an Individual Education Plan (IEP). If it is determined that your child is ineligible for an IEP; a 504 plan is a good option. Please see Appendix, page 30, for *5 Things to Know About a 504 Plan for K-12 Students*.

Setting up an IEP

- If your child does not have an IEP, then you must request that your child be tested.
- Families must request an IEP and/or evaluation from their district of residence.
- Please see *Sample Letter for Requesting Evaluation in Public School*, Appendix, page 24.
- We recommend sending a certified letter to the director of Special Education in your home district requesting an IEP and/or testing. (Determine the name of the Special Education Director first and send the letter directly to that person.)
- Since your child is attending Sand Hill School, the legal process for districts is that the district in which your child currently attends school (this is called your Local Education Agency (LEA) must do the testing. They will administer the testing and send their recommendations to your home school district. However your home school district is not required to accept their recommendations. Most of the time, your home school district may prefer to do their own testing and develop their own recommendations once they have received the testing and recommendations from the LEA. The LEA for Sand Hill School is Palo Alto Unified School District.
- Please see Appendix, page 25, for NCLD's *What is an IEP?*
- Please see Appendix, page 28, for *Top 10 Things to Know About IEPs* from NCLD.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who do I talk with at Sand Hill regarding transition?

Assistant Head of Sand Hill School, Heather Whitlock is currently acting as the Transition Coordinator. You can schedule time to talk with Heather through Brittany Walker.

Does my child need an IEP?

If your child is returning to public school, then we strongly advise you to obtain an IEP.

Should I consider a public school option?

We recommend that you always have a public school option even if you want your child to attend a private school.

What support do you provide for transition?

The transition process begins from the moment of enrollment at Sand Hill until the child is placed in a new school. Transition support includes:

- Counseling with Sand Hill staff to determine transition readiness
- Sand Hill School Transition Guidebook
- School placement support

If you would like to update your child's evaluation, you can arrange for this through The Center here at Children's Health Council.

What do you provide to the transition school?

We provide one copy of each of the following to each school

- Learning Recommendations form (completed by current teachers)
- Current AIMSWeb benchmark data regarding reading and math
- Learning Summary (completed by current teachers and summarizes learning in reading, writing, math, social emotional learning and executive functioning)

What is the ISEE? And SSAT?

Most private schools require a test called Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE). Some private schools require that students complete this test as part of the admissions process for grades 5 and above. Other private schools require the ISEE below grade 5. It is important to know what the private school to which you are applying requires. *It is important to register early for this test (summer) so that you have choice of testing locations that provide accommodations.*

The SSAT is a norm-referenced, standardized test that is required at many independent schools. The SSAT measures the basic verbal, quantitative, and reading skills students develop over time. It is important to register early for this test, especially if you are requesting accommodations. You can find out more online at <http://www.ssat.org/>

Should my child receive special tutoring to prepare for these tests?

This is your choice. At Sand Hill, we will provide instruction in test-taking strategies for norm-referenced, standardized tests. We recommend that if you would like your child to have specific instruction regarding the ISEE or SSAT that you arrange for this type of tutoring outside of Sand Hill.

What special supports will be provided during the transition/application process?

We will provide specific instruction in Executive Function skills that includes test-taking strategies (beginning in grade 4). We will also provide coaching to prepare your child for the shadow/interview process that is usually part of the admissions process at a private school.

What is the typical tenure of a student at Sand Hill before transition?

The number of years a typical student spends at Sand Hill depends upon their personal challenges, their responsiveness to our program and the availability of traditional classrooms that meet their needs.

What resources are available to me?

The Center here at CHC can provide the following services:

- Parent Consultations
- Executive Function coaching
- Evaluation

Community and online resources include:

- Parents Education Network (PEN—parentseducationnetwork.org)
- National Center for Learning Disabilities (nclld.org)
- Pickyparent.com
- Great Schools (greatschools.org)
- International Dyslexia Association (IDA—interdys.org)
- Understood.org

APPENDIX

Sand Hill School Transition Questionnaire
To be completed by parents

STUDENT NAME: _____ **Date:** _____

YOUR NAME: _____ **Town:** _____

What 5 words or phrases would you choose to describe your child?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What are your hopes for your son or daughter?

As you consider a school for your child, what non-academic offerings are important? Are there particular interests or considerations? (i.e. wants football, interested in drama or outdoor activities, be close to home, etc.)

What type of school are you interested in for your child? (Check all that apply)

- _____ Public
- _____ Private Day
- _____ Boarding
- _____ Parochial/ Religious
- _____ No preference/ don't know yet

Are there any specific schools that you are thinking about?

What are your child's general interests or passions? (*loves jazz music, strategic computer games, mountain biking, skiing, etc.*)

What extracurricular activities is your child involved in outside of school? (*clubs, art classes, lessons, scouts, music, etc.*)

Please describe your planned summer activities: (*camps, travel, etc.*)

Please describe any volunteer or work/community experience in which your child has been involved. (*babysitting, pet sitting, community drive, church involvement, etc.*)

Visiting a School Worksheet: What to Ask, What to Look For

School visits provide crucial information that will assist you in your choice. Before a visit, do some planning. During your visit, use this worksheet to record answers to your key questions.

Name of school _____ Recommended by _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Email _____ Website _____

Contact person (principal, etc.) _____ Contact person's phone _____

Contact person's email _____

Type of School

private school

traditional public school

public charter school

Total number of students enrolled _____

Evidence of student diversity _____

Average student-teacher ratio _____

Class size _____

QUESTIONS TO ASK

General

What is the school's philosophy regarding instruction and how students learn?

How do you individualize instruction? _____

What type of support does our school have for kids with learning differences? (Is there a learning specialist on staff) _____

What is your policy on homework? _____

How do you evaluate student progress? How frequently will you report my child's progress?

Are teachers able to provide accommodations for students? _____

What special programs does the school have? (sports, visual arts, performing arts, other)

What is the daily schedule for my child's grade level? _____

What is the school calendar? _____

What are your resources/programs/volunteer opportunities for parents?

Is there an active PTA group? _____

What is your policy on discipline and safety? _____

How do teachers use technology to engage students in the classroom? To communicate with students? To communicate with parents?

How will teachers collaborate to meet my child's learning needs? How do you support professional development?

Do you have LD specialists on your staff? How knowledgeable are classroom teachers about LD?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Cheerful, inviting classrooms
- Displays of student work
- Confident, involved principal
- Enthusiastic, knowledgeable teachers who keep students engaged and connect with them
- Positive behavior in halls, lunchroom, on playground
- Good condition of building, facilities, grounds

ESPECIALLY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS OR ONLINE SCHOOLS

Is Financial Aid available? _____

What is the tuition? Are there payment schedules? _____

Are there additional fees (for extracurricular activities, tutoring, field trips)?

Is the school accredited? _____

By which organization(s)? _____

NOTES/GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

Sample Letter for Requesting Evaluation in Public School

Your Name
Your Street Address
Your City and State
Your Phone Number

Date

Principal's Name
School Name
School Address

Reference: Student's Name
DOB: Student's date of birth
School: Name of School and enrolled grade

Dear XXX:

Our child is currently enrolled at Sand Hill School in Palo Alto, CA. Sand Hill School serves children with language-based learning difference. We are planning to transition our child back to [name of your local school] in the fall of 2016.

We are requesting a comprehensive assessment for special education services for our child to be followed by an IEP meeting. We look forward to receiving the evaluation plan explaining the tests that will be administered. Once we have approved the evaluation, we look forward to scheduling the IEP meeting.

I would also appreciate any other information you have regarding the evaluation, how eligibility is determined, and the general Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.

If you need more information, please call me at home [your home phone] or at work [your work phone).

Thank you very much for your kind assistance. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

Your name
Your contact information

What is an IEP?

By the NCLD Editorial Team

Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#). Each IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly individualized document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability.

To create an effective IEP, parents, teachers, other school staff and often the student must come together to look closely at the student's unique needs. These individuals pool knowledge, experience and commitment to design an educational program that will help the student be involved in, and progress in, the general curriculum. The IEP guides the delivery of special education supports and services for the student with a disability.

General Steps In the Special Education Process

- Child is identified as possibly needing special education and related services.
- [Child is evaluated](#).
- Eligibility is decided.
- Child is found eligible for services.
- IEP meeting is scheduled.
- IEP meeting is held and the IEP is written.
- Services are provided.
- Progress is measured and reported to parents.
- IEP is reviewed.
- Child is reevaluated.

Contents of the IEP

By law, the IEP must include certain information about the child and the educational program designed to meet his or her unique needs. This information covers topics such as current performance, annual goals, special education and related services, accommodations, participation in state and district-wide tests, needed transition services and measured progress.

The IEP Team Members

The team that writes a child's Individualized Education Program includes the parent(s), regular education teacher(s), special education teacher(s), other individuals from the school and district and the student when appropriate.

A meeting to write the IEP must be held within 30 calendar days of deciding that the child is eligible for special education and related services. Each team member brings important information to the IEP meeting. Members share their information and work together to write the child's Individualized Education Program. Each person's information adds to the team's understanding of the child and what services the child needs.

Writing the IEP

To help decide what special education and related services the student needs, generally the IEP team will begin by looking at the child's evaluation results, such as classroom tests, individual tests given to establish the student's eligibility, and observations by teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, related service providers, administrators and others. This information will help the team describe the student's "present level of educational performance"—in other words, how the student is currently doing in school. Knowing how the student is currently performing in school will help the team develop annual goals to address those areas where the student has an identified educational need.

The IEP Team Must Also Discuss Specific Information About the Child. This Includes

- the child's strengths;
- the parents' ideas for enhancing their child's education;
- the results of recent evaluations or reevaluations; and
- how the child has done on state and district-wide tests.

Depending on the needs of the child, the IEP team also needs to consider special factors, which include behavioral issues, limited proficiency in English, blindness or visual impairment, communication needs, deafness or difficulty hearing and assistive technology.

The Discussion of What the Child Needs Be Framed Around How to Help the Child

- advance toward the annual goals;
- be involved in and progress in the general curriculum;
- participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities; and
- be educated with and participate with other children with disabilities and non-disabled children.

Based on the above discussion, the IEP team will then write the child's IEP. This includes the services and supports the school will provide for the child. If the IEP team decides that a child

needs a particular device or service (including an intervention, accommodation, or other program modification), the IEP team must write this information in the IEP.

After the IEP Is Written

When the IEP has been written, parents must receive a copy at no cost to themselves. Everyone who will be involved in implementing the IEP must have access to the document. This includes the child's:

- regular education teacher(s);
- special education teacher(s);
- related service provider(s) (for example, speech therapist); or
- any other service provider (such as a paraprofessional) who will be responsible for a part of the child's education.

Each of these individuals needs to know what his or her specific responsibilities are for carrying out the child's IEP. This includes the specific accommodations, modifications and supports that the child must receive, according to the IEP.

Parents Permission

Before the school can provide a child with special education and related services for the first time, the child's parents must give their written permission.

For more information, visit the [IDEA Guide](#)—especially its chapter on Individualized Education Programs.

Top 10 Things to Know About IEPs

By the NCLD Editorial Team

If your child is struggling in school because of a learning disability (LD), an [Individualized Education Plan \(IEP\)](#) might be an option to support his or her K–12 educational needs. Every public school child who receives special education and related services must have an IEP, and it's hard to understate just how important this document is—it's the cornerstone of a quality education for many students with disabilities. As a parent, you play a key role at all points in the IEP process, and your knowledge and advocacy can make a big difference in ensuring your child's success. As you browse NCLD's IEP Headquarters and learn more about IEPs, here are ten points to be sure you take away:

- **Getting an IEP is one step in the special education process.** In order to get an IEP, a child must be evaluated and found [eligible for special education services](#). An IEP does not automatically follow a LD diagnosis, and not all students with LD will be eligible for an IEP. (If your child is [not eligible for an IEP](#), a 504 plan may be available for in-school support.)
- **The IEP should contain individualized information about your child and lay out the educational program designed to meet his or her needs.** By law, the IEP must include certain information about the child and the [services and supports the school will provide](#). This information covers topics such as current performance, annual goals, special education and related services, accommodations, participation in state and district-wide tests, needed transition services and measured progress. Remember that there is no “standard IEP”—every student has different needs and should receive a different plan. You can use NCLD's [IEP Checklist](#) to make sure your child's IEP includes all necessary components.
- **IEPs are backed by the law.** The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), the key federal education law that serves students with LD, requires that every child eligible for special education services has an IEP and sets requirements for the development, review and revision of the plan. IDEA grants [specific rights](#) to parents and students that you should become familiar with.
- **Parents play a crucial role at all points in the IEP process.** As a parent, you are an important member of [your child's IEP team](#). You have the right to participate in all [IEP meetings](#) and have input in all educational decisions made for your child. You also have the right to bring anyone with you to the IEP meeting that you may find helpful in the discussion. From the initial evaluation to when your child graduates, your active participation will help ensure your child's IEP is crafted and implemented in a way that will lead to his or her success. Make sure you [fully read and understand your child's IEP](#).

IEPs should be results-oriented and time-sensitive. Your child's IEP should state measurable annual goals. Reports should include objective measures—like results gathered by [curriculum-based measurement](#) and standardized tests. (Teacher-given grades and reports are important to consider, but should not be the only measure of progress.) If you're concerned that your child is not making progress, don't hesitate to reach out.

- **Follow-up is key in ensuring proper implementation of the IEP.** Parents often assume that their child’s teachers will know what’s in their child’s IEP—unfortunately, this is not always the case. It’s important to make an effort to [meet with your child’s teachers](#) (including those who teach special classes like music, art and physical education) and other service providers. There’s always a chance that something in the IEP will be overlooked or forgotten, so be sure to monitor your child’s schoolwork, performance on tests and attitude toward school. Check in with your child and his or her teachers to make sure that all services and accommodations are being carried out as stated in the IEP.
- **IEPs must be updated and reviewed at least annually.** IDEA requires that the school team (including parents) meet at least yearly to review the IEP and make changes for the upcoming year. As your child’s challenges, achievements and needs evolve, his or her IEP should change to reflect this. While any [change to the IEP](#) must be approved by the parents and school, parents can request the team meet at any time (be sure to make this request in writing). In other words, if you’re concerned about [your child’s progress](#) and think his or her IEP might need to change, you don’t need to wait until your annual review to discuss the situation.
- **The IEP should include plans for life after high school—long before it’s time to graduate.** IDEA requires that [transition services](#) (plans and measurable goals related to post-secondary training, education, employment, and independent living) be included in a student’s IEP starting at the age of 16. But it’s often wise to start thinking about transition earlier and many states start this process at age 14. Students with LD need to start transition planning in middle school because they may need to take specific classes or courses of study to keep them on a path to achieve their postsecondary goals.
- **Remember that IEPs do not extend to college, post-secondary programs, or the workplace.** The IEP ends at the conclusion of high school, or if the student is going to continue to receive special education services or supports, at the age of 22 (in most states). IDEA services do not continue into a two- or four-year college or the workplace, and needed accommodations will not be granted automatically. Use NCLD’s [Checklist for Transitioning from High School to College](#) to understand how to prepare for the transition out of high school.
- **If there is a dispute over an IEP, you have options.** First, learn more about [your child’s rights under IDEA](#) and check out NCLD’s [IEP Meeting Conversation Stoppers](#) to learn ways to respectfully but forcefully advocate for your child’s rights in some common situations. If you continue to disagree with the school district’s assessment or educational program for your child or believe that the school has violated any IDEA requirements, IDEA provides [dispute resolution options](#) that may be an option for your family. You can always contact your local [Parent Training & Information Center](#) or state education department for more information.

5 Things to Know About a 504 Plan for K-12 Students

by NCLD Editorial Team

If your child is struggling in school due to a learning disability, a 504 plan may be a good option for supporting your child's K–12 educational needs. Before you decide whether to pursue a 504 plan for your child, you'll need to learn about the [similarities and differences between 504 plans and IEPs](#). You'll also need to ask yourself, "[Is a 504 Plan Right for My Child?](#)" As you learn more about 504 plans, here are five key points to keep in mind:

- **The 504 plan protects students who have a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activity.** While the law (i.e., [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)) does not specifically mention learning disabilities, however, "major life activities" can include learning, reading, thinking, writing and concentrating. Section 504 has much broader definitions of disability and so it pertains to many more people. Do not assume that your child is not eligible for protection if he or she doesn't meet the criteria for services under IDEA.
- **The 504 plan outlines educational services to be provided to the student.** The 504 plan should specifically lay out all of the [accommodations](#) and educational services that will be provided to your child. This is the case regardless of whether your child is in general education classes or receives special education instruction. It should be reviewed at least annually so it outlines what your child needs for the upcoming school year.
- **There is no standard 504 plan—every student has different needs and should receive a different plan.** Every student is entitled to receive accommodations and special education services that best fit their needs. This can include: computer/other technology, extended time or privacy for test taking, verbal or non-verbal cues, note-takers or other help. Do not let the school provide your child with a "vanilla package," a set of accommodations the school says it gives to all students with a learning disability.
- **A 504 plan may be a good option for your child, if your child is ineligible for services under IDEA.** The IDEA law requires that your child must meet two prongs of the law in order to be served by special education: 1) The child must have one (or more) of the 13 disabilities listed in IDEA which includes learning disabilities and attention disorders; and, 2) as a result of the disability, the child needs special education to make progress in school in order to benefit from the general education program. This legal requirement essentially says that some kids with LD or attention disorders may not meet the state or district requirements of the second prong. These students however, because they have an LD or ADHD, may meet the requirement to have a 504 plan if their disability "substantially limits them in performing one or more major life activity."

A 504 plan is a good way to formalize accommodations if your child is already receiving them on an informal basis. Sometimes teachers will provide informal or "undocumented"

accommodations, support or services to students as a way to shore up their daily learning. While their efforts may be genuine and may also be helpful to the child in the short-term, it is inappropriate for such informal accommodations to be provided for any length of time especially if the teacher or school suspects the child has a learning disability or attention disorder. You have the right to request an evaluation (in writing) and/or to discuss whether your child is eligible for services under IDEA and/or Section 504.