

Special Education

Child Find

In accordance with federal and state law, the Hancock School District is committed to actively identifying, locating, and evaluating all students ages 3–21 who reside within the district and who may have a disability requiring special education and related services, regardless of the severity of the disability. This includes children who are homeless, wards of the state, highly mobile, attending private schools, or being educated at home. The district’s Child Find responsibilities extend to all students enrolled in the district or otherwise known to reside in the community.

Pre-referral Process and Student Support

The Hancock School District is committed to identifying and addressing students’ academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs through a comprehensive pre-referral process before initiating a formal referral for special education evaluation. This proactive process is designed to ensure that all students are provided with appropriate general education supports and interventions, including targeted instruction, accommodations, and modifications aligned with the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS).

Weekly Consultation and Problem-Solving

Each week, classroom teachers participate in dedicated consultation meetings with the special education teacher to discuss the following:

- Instructional strategies, curriculum access, and accommodations/modifications for students currently on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- Areas where students (not currently on IEPs) may be struggling academically, behaviorally, or socially
- Classroom-based interventions and differentiated instruction strategies
- Opportunities to strengthen inclusive practices and universal supports for all learners

When appropriate, other specialists—such as the occupational therapist (OT), speech-language pathologist (SLP), school counselor, or behaviorist—are invited to join these meetings. Their involvement allows for a multidisciplinary problem-solving approach and helps staff identify and implement appropriate Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports within the general education setting.

Collaboration with MTSS specialist

The special education teacher works closely with the district's MTSS specialist to:

- Identify students in need of targeted academic or behavioral interventions

- Analyze student data (progress monitoring, screening, classroom performance)
- Develop small group or individual interventions
- Monitor intervention fidelity and student response to intervention

These efforts are aimed at supporting student success within the general education environment, reducing inappropriate referrals for special education evaluations, and ensuring that all students receive equitable and timely support.

Data-Informed Decision Making

Before initiating a formal referral for special education evaluation, the following pre-referral steps are generally completed:

1. **Classroom-Based Interventions:** Implementation of instructional strategies, modifications, or accommodations over a reasonable period of time (typically 6–8 weeks) to assess student response.
2. **Data Collection:** Regular progress monitoring and documentation of the student's academic performance, behavior, and/or social-emotional functioning.
3. **Consultation and Team Collaboration:** Ongoing communication among teachers, specialists, administrators, and parents/guardians regarding student needs and intervention outcomes.
4. **Student Support Team (SST) Discussion:** If needed, the Student Support Team (SST) convenes to review data and determine whether a referral for special education evaluation is warranted or whether further general education supports are appropriate.

While parent/guardian consent is not required to provide classroom-based interventions, Hancock School District values parent partnership and encourages ongoing communication throughout the pre-referral process.

Consistent with Massachusetts and federal regulations, the Hancock School District emphasizes early identification and intervention for all students, particularly those from historically marginalized populations or those who may be English Learners (ELs). All efforts are made to ensure that lack of instruction or limited English proficiency is not mistaken for a disability.

The district avoids any delay in referral if there is evidence that the student may require special education services. Staff are trained to recognize signs of disability and to make referrals in a timely manner when general education interventions are insufficient.

Referral For Special Education Testing

In accordance with 603 CMR 28.04, a student may be referred for a special education evaluation by a parent, teacher, administrator, the building-based student support team, or another qualified

professional. The referral process ensures that students who may have a disability and require special education services are identified and evaluated in a timely and equitable manner.

Initiating the Referral

When a referral is made to determine whether a student is eligible for special education, the school district must issue written notice to the student's parent(s) or guardian(s) within five school days. This notice must comply with the requirements set forth in Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3) and federal law and must:

- Inform the parent of the reason for referral
- Seek written consent to conduct an evaluation
- Offer the parent the opportunity to share concerns and input on the student's strengths and needs
- Invite the parent to consult with the Special Education Director or their designee regarding the referral, the proposed assessments, and the professionals who will complete them

If the student is two and a half years old and receiving services through Early Intervention, the initial evaluation process will begin promptly to ensure special education services are in place by the student's third birthday if eligibility is determined.

Parental Requests for Evaluation

When a referral is initiated by a parent, the request—whether oral or written—is forwarded immediately to the Principal and/or the Special Education Director. The district must respond within five school days. The Special Education Director will:

- Confirm receipt of the referral to the parent
- Offer an opportunity to discuss the child's development, strengths, areas of concern, and the evaluation process
- Explain the Student Support Team (SST) process, when applicable
- Determine, in consultation with teachers and other professionals, whether to proceed with a formal evaluation and which assessments should be recommended

Timeline and Consent

Once the decision is made to move forward, the district will send home a notice of proposed evaluation and consent form in the parent's primary language within five school days of the referral. Evaluations cannot begin until the signed consent is received.

Upon receipt of signed parental consent, the district has:

- 30 school days to complete all assessments
- 45 school days to convene a TEAM meeting to determine eligibility

Whenever feasible, TEAM meetings will be scheduled before the 45th day to allow flexibility in case rescheduling is necessary.

Evaluation Components and Procedures

Evaluations must be conducted by appropriately credentialed and trained specialists using assessment tools adapted to the student's age and needs. Each evaluation must address all areas of suspected disability and be sufficiently comprehensive to identify the student's unique educational needs.

Required components include:

1. Educational Assessment

Conducted by a licensed educator, this assessment must include:

- A review of the student's educational history and progress in the general curriculum
- Input from current teachers regarding skills, participation, attention, communication, memory, and social interactions
- A narrative description of the student's educational and developmental potential

2. Assessment in All Suspected Areas of Disability

3. Additional Optional Assessments

As determined necessary, the TEAM may request:

- A comprehensive health assessment by a physician and/or school nurse
- A psychological evaluation by a licensed psychologist or school psychologist
- A home assessment conducted by a qualified professional with parent permission

4. Early Childhood Considerations

For children approaching age three, observations in natural settings (e.g., Early Intervention) are encouraged. When possible, existing EI assessments will be used to avoid duplication.

Each evaluator will summarize:

- The tools and procedures used
- Findings and diagnostic impressions
- The student's needs and recommended services (in educationally relevant and accessible terms)

Evaluators may describe the type of placement that may be appropriate, but may not recommend specific classrooms or schools.

Written evaluation reports will be completed before the TEAM meeting and must be made available to parents at least two days in advance upon request.

Annual Reviews and Reevaluations

- IEPs must be reviewed at least annually.
- A reevaluation must occur at least every three years (or sooner if needed), with parental consent.

The TEAM may determine that no additional assessments are necessary and must document the rationale. Parents retain the right to request a full or partial reevaluation at any time.

Reevaluation consent forms are sent to families at least **60 days** before the IEP expires.

Late-Year Referrals

If a referral is received with fewer than 30 school days remaining in the school year, the district will make every reasonable effort to complete the evaluation and hold a TEAM meeting before the school year ends. If this is not possible, the evaluation will be completed at the start of the following school year. In some cases, evaluations may occur over the summer with TEAM meetings scheduled in early fall.

Independent Education Evaluation (IEE)

If a parent disagrees with an initial evaluation or reevaluation conducted by the Hancock School District, they may request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at any time. IEEs must be conducted by qualified professionals and follow state-approved rates. Parents also have the option to obtain an IEE at their own expense at any time.

When a parent requests that the district fund an IEE, the district will respond within five school days. The district may choose to fund the IEE or may request a due process hearing with the Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA) to demonstrate that the district's evaluation was appropriate. In a BSEA hearing, the district may also show that a parent-obtained IEE does not meet agency criteria, including qualifications of the evaluator, the scope of the evaluation, or applicable cost limits. If the parent elects the voluntary cost-share option, the district may not request a due process hearing.

Once the district receives the IEE report, the IEP Team will reconvene within ten school days to review and consider the findings. Relevant recommendations from the IEE will be incorporated into the student's program as appropriate to support the student's educational needs.

Team Meetings and Outside Reports

Whenever feasible, the building Principal will attend TEAM meetings. If a parent provides a report from an outside evaluator or provider during the meeting, the TEAM will not immediately consider the report. The Team Chair will date-stamp the document, review it following the meeting, and reconvene the TEAM within ten school days to consider its contents.

Parental Rights and Language Access

A Parent's Notice of Procedural **Safeguards** will be provided at least annually and with all initial or reevaluation notices. All documentation—including consent forms and evaluation notices—will be provided in the parent's native language. Parents may waive individual components of an evaluation by signing a waiver form.

The district must maintain documentation of all efforts to obtain parental consent. If consent is not received after multiple documented attempts, the Special Education Director will determine next steps in accordance with legal requirements.

Continuum Of Special Education Service Delivery

The Hancock School District provides a full continuum of special education service delivery options to meet the individual needs of eligible students. Services may include:

- Consultation Services to general education teachers
- Inclusion Services provided within the general education classroom
- Pull-Out Services in a separate setting for targeted instruction
- Related Services (e.g., speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, counseling)
- Extended School Year (ESY) services if needed to prevent substantial regression
- Placement in other public or approved private special education schools when needs cannot be met within the district

Assistive Technology (AT)

The Hancock School District is committed to ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to the tools and services they need to fully participate in the educational program. Assistive Technology (AT) devices and services are available to support students' individual learning, communication, and functional needs.

Definition and Purpose

Assistive Technology includes any item, equipment, or product system—whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized—that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the

functional capabilities of a student with a disability. This includes both low-tech tools (e.g., visual schedules, pencil grips, Velcro, slant boards) and high-tech solutions (e.g., speech-to-text software, iPads, alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) devices). The term does not include surgically implanted medical devices.

AT devices and services may be included as part of special education, related services, or supplementary aids and services. They are considered by the IEP Team during the development or review of each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), based on the student's unique strengths and needs.

AT Devices and Services

Assistive technology may support a range of student needs in areas such as:

- Communication
- Reading and writing
- Vision and hearing
- Math
- Motor skills
- Mobility and positioning
- Study and organizational skills
- Environmental control
- Activities of daily living
- Recreation

AT services include:

- Functional evaluations in the student's educational environment
- Selection, customization, maintenance, and repair of AT tools
- Training for students, families, and school staff
- Integration of the tool into instruction and educational programming
- Ongoing monitoring and support to ensure continued effectiveness

Consideration and Evaluation Process

The IEP Team is required to consider whether a student needs assistive technology devices or services to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This process includes:

- Review of the student's current academic and functional performance
- Collection of work samples and classroom observation
- Consultation with the student, family, teachers, and related service providers
- Development of instructional goals related to areas of need

- Pilot use or trial of tools when appropriate
- Recommendations for tools, strategies, and necessary modifications

If the Team determines that a formal AT evaluation is needed, it is conducted by a qualified professional, often the district's occupational therapist or an external provider such as Easter Seals. These evaluations are typically conducted in the student's classroom or another relevant learning environment.

When AT tools are determined to be necessary, the Team documents where (e.g., classroom, home) and how the device or service will be used to support learning and access to the curriculum. Devices may also be provided for home use if required to support the student's educational program. In these instances, training and support for families is coordinated by the appropriate related service provider.

Training and Implementation

Once an AT tool is selected for a student, training is provided to all relevant stakeholders, including:

- The student
- Parents and caregivers
- Special education and general education teachers
- Paraprofessionals and support staff
- Bus and lunchroom staff (when appropriate)
- Related service providers

Training includes instruction in the operation, care, data collection, and classroom integration of the device. Ongoing support and reassessment are provided to ensure the tool continues to meet the student's needs effectively across settings.

Current Inventory

The Hancock School District maintains a variety of assistive technology devices and tools. If a recommended tool is not currently available, the Occupational Therapist or Special Education Director will determine whether to purchase or lease the item based on the student's need.

Discipline of Students with Disabilities

The Hancock School District ensures that students with disabilities are subject to disciplinary procedures that comply with federal and state law, including IDEA and 603 CMR 28.00, while maintaining equitable protections. Students with disabilities may be suspended or placed in an Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES) or other appropriate placement for up to ten

school days, consistent with the disciplinary practices applied to nondisabled peers. In cases involving weapons, illegal drugs, or controlled substances, the placement may extend up to forty-five school days.

When a student is subject to removal or suspension, the IEP or 504 Team, including the parent, must conduct a manifestation determination within ten school days of the decision to remove the student. During this meeting, the Team reviews the relationship between the student's behavior and the disability. If the behavior is determined to be a direct result of the district's failure to implement the IEP, the district will immediately remedy the deficiency. If the behavior is not a manifestation of the student's disability, the student may be disciplined in the same manner as nondisabled peers, while continuing to receive educational services to allow progress toward IEP goals. Behavioral interventions and modifications will also be provided to address the behavior and prevent recurrence. The Team will also ensure that appropriate services are provided to address the student's problem behavior so that it does not recur.

For suspensions exceeding ten cumulative days, the Team will conduct or review a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), develop or modify a Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP), and determine an appropriate placement that allows the student to continue participating in the general curriculum while receiving the services outlined in the IEP.

Parents are provided with written notice of any disciplinary decision, along with procedural safeguards, on the date the decision is made. The Director of Special Education is notified whenever a student with disabilities is suspended, removed, or placed in an alternative setting.

Students not yet determined eligible for special education also receive protections under federal law if the district had prior knowledge of a possible disability. Prior knowledge exists if a parent expressed concern in writing, requested an evaluation, or district staff raised concerns to supervisory personnel. If no prior knowledge existed and the student is later determined eligible, all protections apply following the eligibility determination. Additionally, if a parent requests an evaluation during or after disciplinary action, the district will conduct an expedited evaluation in compliance with federal requirements.

Discipline of Students with Disabilities and Interim Alternative Educational Settings

The Hancock School District follows all requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Massachusetts special education regulations regarding the discipline of students with disabilities. When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) engages in behavior that may result in disciplinary action, the district reviews the incident and ensures that all decisions are made in accordance with federal and state special education laws. When disciplinary action may result in a change in placement, the district convenes the appropriate staff and members of the student's IEP Team to review the circumstances and determine whether the behavior is a manifestation of the student's disability. Parents are informed of all decisions and provided with procedural safeguards.

In situations where a hearing officer determines that maintaining the student in their current placement is substantially likely to result in injury to the student or others, the student may be placed in an Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES) for up to forty-five school days. The purpose of an IAES is to ensure the safety of the school community while maintaining the student's access to educational services. Any interim placement must allow the student to continue to participate in the general education curriculum and receive the special education services, accommodations, and related services identified in the student's IEP.

The district maintains a continuum of alternative educational options that may serve as an IAES when appropriate. These options may include individualized home tutoring, tutoring at a neutral community location, placement in a specialized instructional or behavioral intervention program, or participation in a virtual learning program when appropriate. In each setting, the district ensures that instruction aligns with the general curriculum and that all services outlined in the student's IEP are delivered.

If a student's behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the student's disability, the student is typically returned to the previous educational placement unless the parents and the district agree to a different placement through the IEP process. During any appeal or hearing process related to disciplinary decisions, the student generally remains in the interim alternative educational placement until the hearing officer issues a decision or the disciplinary period concludes, unless the parents and district agree otherwise. Throughout the process, the district remains committed to ensuring that students with disabilities continue to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) while maintaining the safety and well-being of the school community.

(See Discipline of Students with Disabilities section for more information).

Section 504 Referrals

Students who are not eligible for special education services under IDEA may qualify for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The referral process is initiated by the parent, teacher, or administrator, and the student is evaluated to determine if they have a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities. A 504 plan outlines the accommodations needed to ensure equal access to education.

Transition Planning For Students Age 14+

Beginning at age 14 (or earlier if appropriate), the IEP must include a transition planning form that identifies the student's preferences, interests, and postsecondary goals. The Team will consider instruction, community experiences, employment, and other relevant areas, and update the transition plan annually. By age 18, the student assumes their educational rights unless a legal guardian has been appointed.

Parent Participation And Procedural Safeguards

Parents and guardians play a critical role in the special education process. The district is committed to ensuring that parents understand their rights under federal and state special education law. Procedural Safeguards include:

- Prior written notice for proposed or refused actions
- The right to participate in all meetings
- Access to student records
- The right to request mediation or a due process hearing
- The right to receive documents in their primary language

Parents receive a copy of the **Notice of Procedural Safeguards** at least once per year and whenever an initial referral is made.

Services to Private School and Home-Schooled Students

The Hancock School District is committed to providing equitable special education services to all eligible students residing in the district, including those attending private schools at parental expense and home-schooled students. To ensure compliance with federal and state requirements, the district follows a clear consultation and services planning process.

The district obtains written affirmation from private school representatives or parents to confirm that consultation regarding special education services has occurred. If written affirmation is not received, the district provides documentation from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) outlining the consultation process and requirements. Consultation is an ongoing process throughout the school year, and the district maintains timely and meaningful communication with parents of home-schooled students, private school representatives, and representatives of parents of parentally-placed private school students. These consultations address key topics, including the Child Find process for students suspected of having a disability, the determination and calculation of the proportionate share of federal special education funds (Fund Code 240) and the underlying data, the apportionment of services if federal funds are insufficient, and the methods by which equitable services will be provided directly or through alternative service delivery mechanisms.

For each eligible private school or home-schooled student receiving proportionate share services, the district develops a Services Plan that outlines the specific services to be provided and the methods for their delivery. Meetings are convened to develop, review, and revise Services Plans, with participation from parents and private school representatives. Participation can occur in person or via conference call to ensure meaningful engagement. The district apportions services equitably among all eligible students and may supplement federal funds with state or local funds if necessary to meet student needs.

The Hancock School District collects and reports data annually to the ESE, including the number of private school and home-schooled students evaluated, the number determined eligible for special education services, and the number of students served, regardless of the placement setting. This data ensures accountability and informs the district's ongoing planning and provision of equitable special education services.

English Learners With Disabilities

The Hancock School District ensures that English Learners (ELs) are not misidentified as students with disabilities due to language differences. The evaluation process considers cultural and linguistic factors and utilizes qualified bilingual professionals and/or interpreters. EL students found eligible for special education receive both ESL and special education services as appropriate. (See English Language Learner section for more information).

Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)

Hancock collaborates with neighboring districts to support a Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC). The SEPAC works with the district to promote effective special education programming and parent engagement. Parents are encouraged to participate in SEPAC activities or to contact the Special Education Director for more information.

Home/Hospital Instruction

If a student is unable to attend school for medical reasons, the district will provide home or hospital instruction upon receipt of a physician's statement verifying that the student is expected to be absent for 14 or more days (consecutive or cumulative). Instruction will begin promptly and is coordinated by the Special Education Director or designee in collaboration with the student's medical team and classroom teachers. (See Home/Hospital Instruction section for more information)