



# A Guide for Parents as They Consider Special Education Placement

*Parents are an important part of the IEP team and are entitled to visit proposed placements. This guide is designed to help you assess and compare placements so that you can make informed decisions about the appropriateness of a program for your son or daughter with disabilities.*

## **ASAHA**

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*Partnerships for Promising Futures*

Notes:

## GETTING STARTED

### Before your visit

Ask for copies of the school’s handbook and brochure to familiarize yourself with the program.

If the school has a website, visit it to learn as much as you can.

### On the day of your visit

Use this guide to help structure your visit. Highlight questions or areas that are particularly important to you. Bear in mind that some of the services listed will be more or less relevant to your child’s needs. For example, if your child does not use a wheelchair, mobility and positioning services may not be important to your child’s program.

Ask to spend instructional time in the classroom where your child might be placed.

Keep an open mind throughout your visit and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

## SCHOOL FACILITY

One of the first things most parents notice about a school is the facility:

### Classrooms

Do classrooms reflect the needs of the students who learn there? Are they conducive to the ways in which your child learns? Are they part of the school building, or set off, either in a basement, trailer or remote part of the building? If they are set off, is it for instructional reasons, such as limiting noise and distractions?

### Therapy Areas & Adaptive Equipment

Are therapy services offered at the program? If yes, are they offered in the classroom, or in separate rooms? Does equipment appear to be clean and well-maintained?

### Outdoor Areas

Are outdoor areas secure? Do they offer age-appropriate activities? Are they safe and well-maintained? Are they accessible?

### Computers & Technology

Is computing hardware, software, and other technology readily available to students? How is it being used as part of the curriculum? Is it current?

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**Restrooms**

Are restrooms in or near the classroom? Are they clean and safe? Is there a place for privacy if support with personal care is needed?

**Security**

How are students and teachers kept safe at all times? Does the school have a system or written plan in place to deal with emergencies? Are parking, pick-up, and drop-off areas safe and well-supervised? How are visitors handled?

**Gym**

Is there space for physical education? Is it clean, safe, and well-lit?

**Daily Living Skills**

If the students are learning activities of daily living, is there a kitchen, bedroom, or laundry area?

## PROGRAM SPECIFICS

It is important that program characteristics be *observed*, as well as reported by staff or administration.

**Mission & Philosophy**

What is the mission of the program? Can you see elements of the mission or philosophy in action?

**History**

How long has the program been in operation? Does the program have a "track record?"

**Curriculum**

Curriculum refers to *what* is being taught. All programs are required to use the State of New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards.

Do you see evidence of this? In what ways is the curriculum adapted for the needs of the students? What subjects are offered at each grade level? Are other areas of instruction offered, such as:

- |                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ■ Behavior & Social Skills | ■ Career Training & Awareness |
| ■ Transition to Adult Life | ■ Community-Based Instruction |
| ■ Life Skills              | ■ Recreation                  |

**Instructional Strategies**

Instructional strategies refer to *how* the curriculum is taught.

Does the school use evidenced-based 'best practices' for the students they serve? Does the school use specific methods of instruction

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(i.e., Applied Behavior Analysis for students with autism; Orton-Gillingham-based reading instruction; or American Sign Language) if appropriate? Are staff appropriately supervised and credentialed? Does the school offer one-to-one or small group instruction? How does the program individualize instruction to meet the unique needs of each student?

**Assessment**

How is student progress monitored and assessed? Do students participate in state assessments? How are testing modifications and accommodations provided?

**Class types**

How many classes are in the program? What is the male to female ratio? Does the school serve a wide range of special needs, or a specific population? Is there more than one class per grade level? How are class assignments made? What is the age range in the class?

**Class Size & Configuration**

What is the student to teacher ratio? What is the role of paraprofessionals? Do students work with several teachers, or just one? Who has primary responsibility for each student’s instruction?

**Schoolwide Programs**

Does the program offer schoolwide programs such as a prom, sports, leadership opportunities, student government, performing arts programs, community service, after school clubs, or overnight trips? How are all students meaningfully included as participants in school wide programs? What supports are available to allow students to actively participate?

**Homework**

What is the school policy toward homework? How much should the student expect? What is the role of parents in homework?

**RELATED SERVICES**

Related services are an important part of the special education program for many students.

Does the program offer the related services your child needs in order to benefit from special education? Are the services offered in the classroom, or in a separate room? Are the services offered at the school, or do students leave the school? Are the related services professionals members of the school staff or are they consultants? How often and when are they at the program? Below is a checklist to help you organize information on related services provision.

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**Related Services  
On-site or Consultative?**

**Individual**

**Group**

**Notes:**

Speech/Language Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occupational Therapy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Therapy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audiology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Psychological	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Positioning & Mobility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School Health Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behavior Specialist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assistive Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nursing Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Psychiatric Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Nursing Services**

For some students, access to nursing and health services is vital. Is there a school nurse? Can he/she administer medication? Does he/she have nursing experience that matches the needs of your child? How are other health issues (seizures, insulin injections, etc.) managed? How are specific services such as clean catheterization provided?

**BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT**

For many students with disabilities, special education services are needed to reduce challenging behavior and replace them with more appropriate behavior.

How does the program plan for and manage challenging behavior? Is the behavior system utilized on a school-wide basis, or is it limited to particular students and/or classrooms? Does the school use a system of rewards and privileges for appropriate behavior? How is data collected and used to make decisions?

Does the school use specific procedures to reduce inappropriate behavior? Does the school use restraint procedures or time-out procedures? How is the use of these procedures monitored and reported to parents? How are staff trained and supervised? Are certifications maintained? How are parents involved in the decision-making about behavior management? What is the program's policy for suspension and expulsion?

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## ROLE OF PARENTS

Parent participation can be an important part of a special education program.

**Formal Role for Parents:** Is there a PTO or PTA? What is its role?

**Parent Involvement:** Are parent volunteers welcome at school? In the classroom? What is the school's policy on parental visits and observations?

**Home-School Communication:** How is home-school communication handled?

**Parent Support/Parent Education:** Is there a support group for parents? Is parent training or parent education part of the program? Is there in-home support, if needed? Are parents encouraged to network with one another? Are there parent references you can call?

## STAFF & ADMINISTRATION

All staff should be appropriately credentialed for the positions they hold, and should be certified and experienced.

What is the rate of staff turnover? What is the mix of new staff and experienced staff? Are program supervisors and clinical staff on-site and available to answer questions?

## STUDENTS

What is the age range of students accepted at the program? At what age do students "age out?" Where do most students go when they leave? Are there students in the school who remind you of your own child? How far do most students travel to come to school? How long do most students remain at the program?

## LICENSURE & ACCREDITATION

Is the school affiliated with, approved, or accredited by an independent source?

**Approval:**

- New Jersey Department of Education                       Other State department

**Affiliations:**

- ASAH membership                       National Association of Private Special Education Centers  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**After your visit:**

What was your general feeling about the program and the people you met?

Did you feel welcomed and were your questions answered?

Are the people you met knowledgeable about your child's disability?

*This guide was produced by ASAH, formerly the Association of Schools and Agencies for the Handicapped, to help parents as they make decisions about their child's special education program. It is available online in both English and Spanish at [http://www.asah.org/pdf/placement\\_guide.pdf](http://www.asah.org/pdf/placement_guide.pdf)*

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