

What is Special Education in Kansas?

The Big Picture

Special education is not a place. It is a set of supports and services designed to help students with disabilities access their education and reach their full potential. In Kansas, special education follows federal law (IDEA) and is guided by rules from the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE).

If your child struggles with learning, behavior, communication, or development, they may be eligible for services to help them succeed in school.

Who is Eligible?

To receive special education in Kansas, a student must:

1. **Have a disability** in one of 13 IDEA categories (like autism, ADHD, learning disability, or emotional disturbance)
2. **Need special education services** to make progress in the general education setting

Just having a medical diagnosis is not enough. The school team must show that the disability affects educational performance and requires specially designed instruction.

What Happens Before a Referral?

Before a student is referred for special education, schools in Kansas use a system called **MTSS** (Multi-Tiered System of Supports). This is part of general education and includes:

- Regular screening for academic and behavioral needs
- Tiered interventions matched to the student's level of need
- Data collection to see what strategies are working

If a student does not make adequate progress with these general education supports, a referral for a special education evaluation may be considered. Parents can also request an evaluation at any time.

What Does Special Education Include?

Special education can look different for every child. It may include:

- Specialized instruction in reading, math, writing, or social skills
- Speech therapy, occupational therapy, or physical therapy
- Accommodations (like extended test time or visual supports)
- Support from a special education teacher in or outside the classroom
- Behavior support or mental health services

These services are written into an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**, a legal plan that outlines goals, services, and how progress will be tracked.

The IEP Process at a Glance

1. **General Education Interventions (MTSS)** – Tiered supports are provided and progress is monitored
 2. **Referral** – A parent or school staff member expresses concern
 3. **Evaluation** – Specialists assess your child in several areas
 4. **Eligibility Meeting** – The team (including you) reviews results
 5. **IEP Meeting** – If eligible, an IEP is written with your input
 6. **Services Begin** – The school provides services as written in the IEP
 7. **Annual Review** – The IEP is updated at least once a year
 8. **Reevaluation** – Every 3 years to check continued eligibility
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Key Terms to Know

- **IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (federal law)
- **KSDE:** Kansas State Department of Education
- **IEP:** Individualized Education Program
- **LRE:** Least Restrictive Environment – learning with peers whenever possible
- **FAPE:** Free Appropriate Public Education – your child's legal right

- **MTSS:** Multi-Tiered System of Supports – early support through general education
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What Other Parents Say

- “I didn’t know we could request an evaluation — we thought we had to wait for the school.”
 - “The IEP meeting was overwhelming, but once I understood the process, I felt more in control.”
 - “Every year I learn more — now I feel like part of the team.”
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Parent Reflection Space

- What concerns do I have about how my child learns, behaves, or interacts?
 - What helps my child thrive in and outside of school?
 - What questions do I want to ask the school team?
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Important Reminder

This guide is based on Kansas special education law and practices. For the most current and specific guidance, always connect with your child’s school team or visit the Kansas State Department of Education website at www.ksde.org.