

What is Child Find?



By Andrew M.I. Lee, JD

Public schools have a big responsibility—they must *identify, locate, and evaluate* any kids who need special education. This is called “Child Find.” Looking for and finding these kids is an important first step toward getting them the help they need to thrive in school.

When a school knows, or thinks a child could have a disability, it must evaluate the child. Child Find applies to kids from birth to age 21. It can cover kids with learning and thinking differences, developmental delays, and other conditions.

It’s not enough for public schools to look only at current students. They must also seek out kids in migrant families and those without homes. You might be surprised to learn that they’re even responsible for finding kids who are homeschooled or in private schools.

Child Find is part of the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**. The purpose of the law is to serve the education needs of kids with disabilities. Each state and its public schools must have policies and procedures for finding these kids. They must also develop practical methods to identify which kids qualify for special education and related services.

All public K-12 schools have evaluation systems. Also, all states have **early intervention programs** to serve infants and toddlers who haven’t started school. There are also referrals for kids in in foster care or juvenile justice who may need help.

Dive deeper

How Child Find works

It's clear to see how K-12 public schools evaluate kids once they suspect a need. But how do schools look for kids in the first place?

State governments and schools use a variety of outreach efforts. They may run local media campaigns and post notices in public places. They may also send information to health care providers, like doctors and clinics. In some cases, they may even send staff into the community. This is important because parents and caregivers may not know what help is available.

Learn more about [what the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act covers](#).

What happens when an evaluation is requested

Child Find doesn't require a school to agree to every request for evaluation. If the school has reason to believe a child has a disability, then it must do an evaluation. For example, a teacher or parent may be concerned about a child's schoolwork and ask for an evaluation. By law, the school must consider the request.

However, the school doesn't have to agree to *every* request for evaluation. If there's no reason to think the child has a disability that requires services, the school doesn't need to evaluate.

Learn about [requesting an evaluation](#).

When schools don't follow Child Find

Sadly, there have been cases where public schools have dropped the ball and failed to identify kids who need special education. Sometimes, it's a single child that the school

should have evaluated because of obvious struggles. In other situations, school districts have had widespread problems with locating kids who need help.

When a school fails its responsibility to Child Find, parents or caregivers may have a legal claim. If the problem is schoolwide, the state or federal government may step in to make sure the school does its job.

Find out [who's responsible for making sure schools follow special education law](#).

Next steps

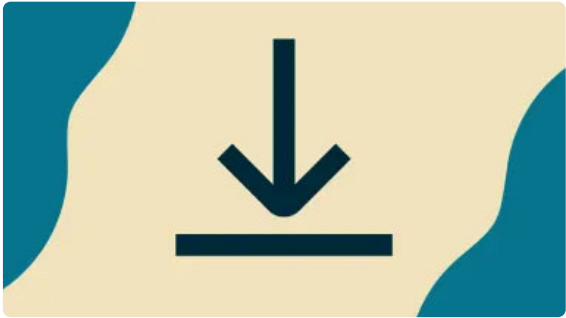
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