

Rhode Island's Child Outreach Screening & Preschool Special Education Programs

"Ensuring that young children have access to the interventions necessary to accelerate learning, improve outcomes, & reduce the readiness gap prior to kindergarten entry"

What is Child Outreach screening?

Child Outreach is RI's developmental screening program for 3-5-year-olds. It has been designed to be a quick and inexpensive means of reaching a large number of young children, identifying those that require more comprehensive evaluation and ultimately connecting children to necessary interventions. Child Outreach strives to screen every 3-5-year-old child each year prior to kindergarten entry.

Each school district is responsible for implementing Child Outreach (CO) for the children that reside in their district. CO provides screenings in five domains- vision, hearing, speech/language, social/emotional, and general development (cognition, language, fine motor, & gross motor). Screenings take place in early care and education settings, at open screenings in the community and upon request. Children are screened in their dominant languages whenever possible, with the use of interpreters as needed.

Requests for screenings can be made by families, physicians, or educators. Most districts provide screenings between September and June and are closed during the summer. Requests for screening during the summer months will be processed upon the opening of school. If however, the delay in screening is a concern, families can make referrals directly to special education at any time.

Requests can be faxed to the patient's district of residence through the PCP's EHR. Up to date contact information can be found at www.ride.ri.gov/childoutreachcontacts.

What is the process if I request a screening?

If a parent, physician, or educator request a screening for a specific child, screenings generally take place within 10 school days. Some children, however, require rescreens, which should occur within three weeks of the initial screen. Given parental consent, Child Outreach (CO) notifies the party requesting the screen of the results and recommendations within six weeks. Unless parents have requested otherwise, primary care providers can view CO results for all of their patients within the KIDSNET database. Child Outreach contact information, including fax numbers, are available at www.ride.ri.gov/childoutreachcontacts.

What happens if a child fails the Child Outreach screening?

Primary care providers are routinely notified when children fail vision and/or hearing so that the child can be referred for further medical evaluation. Children that fail general development, social/emotional or speech/language are referred to special education in their local school district. Within 10 school days of receipt of the referral, school districts are required to hold an evaluation team meeting, which includes the family, to re-view the referral and if there is suspicion of a disability or delay, to determine what evaluations are necessary. Children must be evaluated in all areas of concern to determine eligibility for special education.

How is eligibility for special education determined?

Within 60 calendar days of the parent's consent to evaluate, districts are required to hold a second evaluation team meeting to determine special education eligibility. Children eligible for services are identified either under one of the 13 disability categories or as a child with a developmental delay and who by reason thereof, require special education and related services. A medical diagnosis alone does not determine a child's eligibility. Developmental delays may exist in any of the following domains: physical, cognitive, communication, social/emotional, or adaptive development. It is important to recognize that children do not need to have a cognitive delay to be eligible for services. For example, children with significant social/emotional or behavioral needs do not need to present with a deficit in the cognitive domain.

Once a child is determined to be eligible for special education, how are services identified?

Eligibility for special education does not determine the specific services that a child will require. Within 10 school days of the eligibility, parents are again invited to attend a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP includes the child's present levels of performance, goals for the year and ultimately the necessary services. As opposed to what some might assume, special education is a service and not a separate class or school. Special Education refers to specially designed instruction, at no-cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. It is delivered in the least restrictive environment (LRE), which is frequently a general education classroom. Through special education, children are provided with the supplemental aids and services that they require to be successful. An alternate educational setting may be considered only when the child's needs cannot be appropriately met given these supplemental aids and services.