

Referral & Screening Process

Are you concerned about a child's development? Initial referrals for special education evaluation may be made by parents/guardians, Early Intervention providers, or pediatricians. Initial referrals for evaluation may be made **six months prior to the child's third birthday**. Below are the steps in the referral process:

- 1. Contact** the Special Start office to schedule an intake or Early Intervention transition meeting:
 - Jeannie Parkus, Early Childhood Special Educator at 617.349.3252 or jparkus@cpsd.us.
- 2. Discuss** your concerns, areas of strength, and relevant developmental history with a member of the Special Start team during an intake or Early Intervention transition meeting. Following this meeting, we will generate and mail a consent to evaluate form.
- 3. Sign and return** the consent to evaluate form
- 4. Participate** in the evaluation process, which may include assessments with psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and/or physical therapists. Caregivers will receive reports of assessment results prior to the eligibility meeting.
- 5. Meet** with the evaluation team to determine eligibility for special education.

If your child already has already been found eligible in another district, and has an IEP, please contact Meghan Singh, Lead Teacher for School Entry, at 617.349.9448 or msingh@cpsd.us for more information about the school entry process.



District Contacts

Dr. Victoria Greer
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Karyn Grace
Interim Assistant Superintendent
for Student Services

Shelagh Walker, M.Ed.
Early Childhood & Elementary Coordinator
skellywalker@cpsd.us

Heather Francis, Ed.M.
Lead Teacher, Early Childhood
hfrancis@cpsd.us

Kevin Mundt, Psy.D.
Early Childhood Specialist Lead
kmundt@cpsd.us

**MORE
INFO ABOUT
SPECIAL START**

617.349.3251
[bit.ly/special
start](https://bit.ly/specialstart)



SPECIAL START PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Office of Student Services
Cambridge Public Schools



Program At a Glance

Cambridge Public Schools Special Start Program provides special education services and programs for children with a wide range of disabilities. The program is designed to partner with caregivers to provide appropriate screening, evaluation, and special education services to young children.

Children with disabilities are assigned to classrooms through the special education Team Evaluation Process and have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The Special Start program serves children from a range of disability categories, including:

- Autism
- Communication Impairment
- Developmental Delay
- Emotional Impairment
- Health Impairment
- Intellectual Impairment
- Neurological Impairment
- Physical & Health
- Sensory Impairment (vision, hearing)
- Specific Learning Disability

Special Start classrooms offer a play-based educational experience in both integrated and substantially separate classrooms. Children who do not have disabilities are enrolled through the lottery process. Special Start teachers design innovative, emergent curriculum with individualization for every child based on their growth and development. The program provides a high student-teacher ratio to support individual programming and service delivery. Teachers also partner with related service providers to offer whole class motor, sensory and/or language development groups. This supportive program helps children to build important social, play, and communication skills that are critical for early childhood development.



Services & Programs

A young child who is deemed eligible for special education receives services in the least restrictive environment (LRE), which can include a child care setting or a public school, as determined by the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team. Services are provided at no cost to families through the Cambridge Public Schools. Processes for referral for evaluation and determination of eligibility are the same as those for older, school-aged children with disabilities.

COMMUNITY GROUPS & SINGLE THERAPY SESSIONS

Related service providers and Special Educators provide instruction for students in Special Start classrooms who require significant accommodations, direct instruction, and/or related services therapies. These classroom placements are determined by the IEP team.

INTEGRATED CLASSROOMS

Children with mild to moderate disabilities may be placed in inclusive classrooms with children without disabilities. Special educators, related service providers, school psychologists, behavior specialists, and assistive technology specialists collaborate to implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in the classroom. In these classrooms, teachers use a play-based learning approach and individualized, specially designed instruction for children with disabilities. Children with IEPs are assigned to integrated classrooms through the team evaluation process. Children without IEPs enter integrated classrooms through the 3-year-old lottery process.

SUBSTANTIALLY SEPARATE CLASSROOMS

Children with moderate to severe disabilities may be placed in classrooms with low teacher-student ratios and additional instructional time. Special educators, related service providers, school psychologists, behavior specialists, and assistive technology specialists collaborate to implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in the classroom. In these classrooms, teachers use a play-based learning approach and more systematic teaching approaches such as Applied Behavioral Analysis. This may include incidental, direct, and discrete trial teaching. Children in substantially separate classrooms may have opportunities for inclusion time in our integrated classrooms based on team recommendations.