

Transportation and Children with Disabilities

What do parents need to know about transportation? The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes transportation within its definition of “related services.” This means that students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) have the right to receive special transportation services if it is needed. Transportation and assistance may be provided to a child whose disability requires the child to:

- go to and from school;
- travel between schools; or
- move around inside of school buildings or around the school grounds.

Some students with disabilities need special equipment such as separate or adapted buses, lifts and ramps.

Jenny uses a power wheelchair to get around her school. She has an IEP. She needs ramps to get around safely inside the school and on the school grounds. This need is included in her IEP. Her IEP also includes the need for a bus with a wheelchair lift. The school provides the bus which also picks up all the children in her neighborhood.

Who decides if a child needs transportation services? A child’s IEP team, which includes the parents, decides whether a child needs transportation services. This is based on assessment. The school will arrange transportation if the IEP team decides that a child’s disability prevents him or her from:

- using the same transportation as children who don’t have disabilities
- going to and from school in the same way as children who do not have disabilities.

Monty is a second grader. Monty’s disability makes it hard for him to pay attention. He has a poor sense of direction and poor problem solving abilities. At his IEP meeting, the team decided that it would not be safe for Monty to travel to and from school. He became lost twice on his way to the bus stop near his home, and was once picked up by the police after he missed the bus and wandered into traffic as he tried to get home. The IEP team included door-to-door transportation as part of his IEP.

A child’s IEP includes transportation as a related service. Will the parent have to pay for this? No. The school must pay the cost of transportation services included in an IEP.

Jonah is a preschooler whose parents both work. He attends day care in his neighborhood. Jonah was screened by the public school and found to have a disability. His IEP states that he is to receive speech therapy twice a week at his neighborhood school. The school provides a bus to take him between his day care setting and the school where he receives therapy. There is no charge for this service.

Do all students with disabilities have the right to transportation? No. Only students with disabilities who need transportation services and have them included in the IEP receive them. If transportation services are not in a child’s IEP, the child will be treated like all other children:

- if the school transports students without disabilities, the child with a disability will travel with them
- if the school does not provide transportation to students who don’t have disabilities, the child with a disability will not receive them

Sally has a disability but does not need special transportation and it is not included in her IEP. Her family lives less than one mile from school. The school district does not provide transportation to students living less than a mile from school. Sally will walk to school or her family will arrange another way for Sally to travel to and from school.

Do most children with disabilities need special transportation? No. Most children with disabilities are able to use the same transportation system as their classmates who don't have disabilities. Sometimes just adding special equipment or aides to school buses is all that is required for a student with a disability.

Carol has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Sometimes she acts without thinking. She rides to school on the bus with her neighborhood friends. Carol's IEP includes a positive behavior plan to help her learn to follow bus rules. The bus driver and the bus aide received training to carry out Carol's behavior plan. They are responsible for putting the behavior plan into action as part of the IEP.

My son goes to private school. Does he still have the right to transportation? It depends. Yes, if the IEP team placed your son in private school in order to receive special education and determined that he needed transportation based on his disability. It would then be written into his IEP, and transportation would be provided. However, if you placed your son in private school as a matter of personal choice, the rules are different. Talk to your local special education department for the answer.

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PATH Project: 1-800-866-4726



PEN Project: 1-877-762-1435



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