

Exceptional Student Education  
Henry County Schools

# PROGRAM GUIDANCE: PRESCHOOL SPECIAL NEEDS



**BETTER TOGETHER**

## Definition and Overview

***How do you identify children for early intervention, and what does early intervention look like?*** Special education is instruction specifically designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children with disabilities, or those who are experiencing developmental delays. Special Education Services or called Exceptional Student Education (ESE) for preschool children (ages 3 through 5) are provided free of charge through the public school system. These services are available through the same law—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—that makes available: early intervention services (BCW- Part C of IDEA) and services for school aged children in grades K-12 (Part B of IDEA).

Children who received early intervention services, and found eligible, may begin special needs preschool upon their transition out of an early intervention program like Babies Can't Wait (at age three). Another way very young child become identified as needing special services lies in the process of attending regular well visits and child check-ups with a pediatrician. This can lead to a comprehensive evaluation to fully determine if a child has a significant delay or disability, which would require specialized supports. In keeping with IDEA, each State must have comprehensive systems of child find in order to identify, locate, and evaluate children with disabilities residing in the State, and who are in need of special education and related services. It is not uncommon for a babysitter, a daycare provider, or preschool staff to express concern to a child's parents about a possible developmental or learning delay. The parents contact the appropriate agency to have the child screened and/or evaluated to determine if there is an underlying problem or delay that might need to be addressed. Such screenings/evaluations cover a range of skill areas—vision and hearing, gross and fine motor skills, speech and language use, social and emotional behavior, and more.

A child may be eligible for preschool special needs services if he/she shows a significant delay in any of the five areas of development:

- Cognitive (thinking and learning);
- Communication (understanding and using language);
- Physical/motor (vision, hearing, and movement);
- Social/emotional (getting along with other people); and
- Adaptive/self • help (independent skills: toileting, eating, dressing).

Henry County Schools (HCS) will evaluate the child to see if he/she qualifies for services. If developmental delays are evident, HCS will work closely with families to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP is a plan that discusses the child's abilities and defines the services, which will be provided to meet the unique needs. These services may be provided at home, at the child's preschool or childcare center, in a separate special education setting, or in a combination of settings. For example, some children may receive speech therapy to address a delay in communication, while other children may work with a special education teacher for a set number of hours per week. With these types of services, many children are able to participate in a general education preschool program, such as Head Start, 3-K or Pre-K, alongside children who do not have disabilities. Some children with more significant needs may attend small, structured special needs preschool classes taught by special education teachers. The preschool years are a critically important time to

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provide special education services to children with developmental delays or disabilities. At this early age, children's brains are going through their most important period of development, so this is the time when services can make the biggest impact. *This guide explains how you can help to ensure your preschool child receives the services he/she needs to make academic, social, and emotional progress and enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.*

The preschool special needs program is part of a national law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA states that children with disabilities or developmental delays have the right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). The law provides services for children ages 0-3 (Early Intervention), ages 3-5 (preschool special education), and ages 5-21 (school-age special education). Preschool special education services must be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE), which means, to the maximum extent possible, a student who qualifies for special education services should be educated alongside students who do not have disabilities.

A range of special education programs and services are available to eligible preschool children. These services fall along a continuum from less restrictive to more restrictive. Less restrictive programs allow children to receive their services alongside preschoolers who do not have IEPs. Programs that are more restrictive are available to children with more severe disabilities who require more specialized, supportive services alongside other children who also have IEPs. The law requires that children be educated in the least restrictive environment that is appropriate to meet the child's needs. Preschool children can receive the following types of programs (listed from less restrictive to more restrictive):

→ **Related Services:** Related services include speech therapy, physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), counseling, vision and hearing education services, orientation and mobility services, school health services, and parent training. Licensed professionals who work with each child either one-on-one or in a small group provide these services. The services may be provided at the child's 3-K, Pre-K, preschool, or childcare center; in the home; or, if appropriate based on the child's specific needs. At the IEP meeting, the team should decide which related services your child needs, the number of sessions per week, the length of each session, the size of the group, and the location where the service will take place (usually the child's preschool).

→ **Special Education Community Based:** A special education teacher or paraprofessional who comes to work with each child on academic, emotional, and social skills either one-on-one or in a small group. Services may be provided at the child's 3-K, Pre-K, preschool, or childcare center or in the home. The child's IEP will state the exact hours and services.

→ **Special Class in an Integrated Setting, Inclusive Preschool:** A special class in an integrated setting is a preschool class that includes preschool students who have IEPs and preschool students who do not have IEPs. This classroom must include at least one special education teacher and one paraprofessional, and may have additional staff members.

→ **Special Class, Half-day and Full-day Preschool:** A special class is a preschool class in which all the students are preschoolers who have IEPs. These

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classes are often smaller than a typical preschool classroom and have a lower student to teacher ratio. The lower the student to teacher ratio, the more restrictive the class is considered. This class can be provided for the full day or for half a day. The IEP team, based on individual needs of each student, designates hours and service models.

### Instructional Expectations

***What are HCS Preschool Special Needs Learning Progressions, and how were they developed?*** In an effort to unify the district with common goals and structure, Henry County ESE Preschool Department developed a two-year plan to integrate learning progressions across six domains. To determine best practices, preschool teachers piloted a variety of approved curriculums, while collecting data on student engagement, to determine which curriculum would be most engaging for the diverse preschool population. After reviewing compiled data, the committee designed a two-year curriculum map to ensure success for all teachers and students. This outlined plan was designed to increase student achievement, create identity, encourage collaboration, and to build a common resource center for all ESE preschool classrooms. The learning progressions (or curriculum roadmap) includes a bi-weekly layout to support the following: communication, language and literacy; physical development and motor skills; social/emotional development; cognitive development; approaches to play and phonemic awareness.

All preschool ESE teachers are required to use the learning progressions as a guide on what to teach in their classrooms. Preschool teachers have autonomy to be innovative and creative when adding supplemental learning activities to the core domains. An online resource library, Blendspace, was created for preschool teachers to use. Blendspace has updated interactive resources, which provides teachers everything they need for each day in one easy to use location. Resources were organized by month for each domain listed on the learning progressions. In addition to teachers, parents are encouraged to access Blendspace and use the resource library at home. Preschool teachers are expected to follow building level requirements for lesson planning, data collecting, instructional adaptations and any requirement from administrators.

[YEAR 1 HCS PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING PROGRESSIONS](#)  
[YEAR 2 HCS PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING PROGRESSIONS](#)

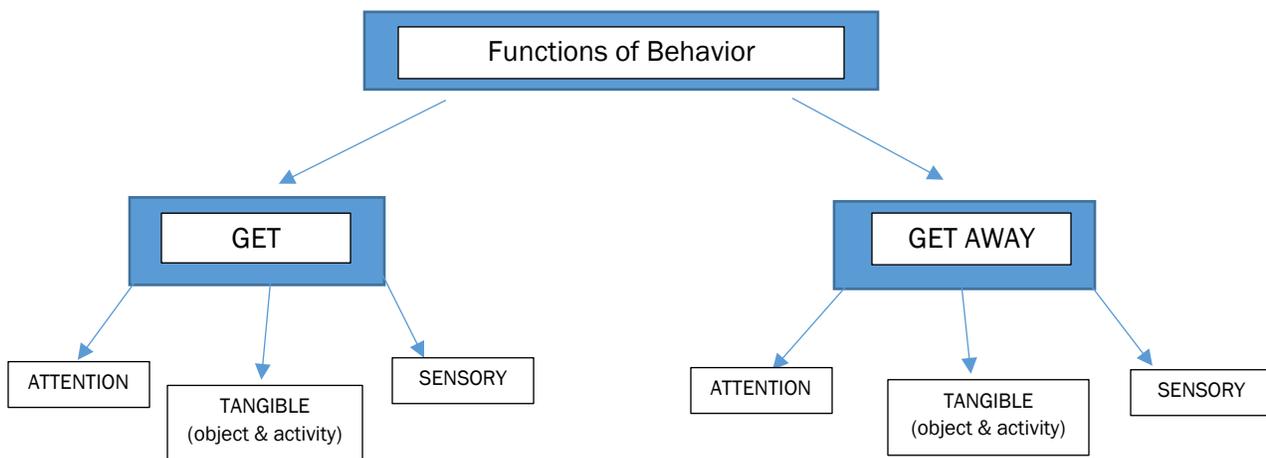
### Behavioral Supports and Resources

***What does the research say?*** From learning activities to transitions, children's challenging behavior can influence every aspect of a classroom. This disruption often can overwhelm early childhood teachers, who report feeling concerned and frustrated about classroom management (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Corso 2012) as well as underprepared to address challenging behavior proactively (Stormont, Lewis, & Covington Smith 2005). These concerns are justified for several reasons. Children who frequently exhibit challenging behavior may have fewer friends or lower academic performance, and research links the persistent challenging behavior of young children to more serious behavior problems and negative consequences as they get older (Dunlap et al. 2006; McCartney et al. 2010). However, just as behavior can affect all aspects of a learning environment, all the aspects of a learning environment can be structured to promote positive behavior.

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**Why behavior happens?** Most all behaviors occur for a reason. Behavior is anything we say or do. It is how we react to our environment. It is important to understand why problem behaviors occur in order to effectively intervene and resolve the problem behavior. Behaviors are directly affected by events in the environment that occur prior (antecedent) to the behavior. These events or circumstances in the environment help “trigger” the behavior. Similarly, the events that immediately follow the behavior (consequence) can help maintain, increase or decrease problem behaviors. Behaviors that lead to satisfying outcomes are likely to be repeated. Behaviors that lead to undesired outcomes are less likely to be repeated. When we become aware of what occurs prior to the behavior and what occurs after the behavior, we are better equipped to identify “why” the problem behavior is occurring. Understanding the problem behaviors purpose or “function” makes it possible to intervene effectively and resolve the problem behavior. All behavior is communication...remember the child is trying to tell you something.

**You Must Know the WHY in order to intervene with APPROPRIATE interventions-** There are two major functions of behavior: to GET something or to GET AWAY from something. Look at the following chart. Think of behaviors you have encountered or some of your own behavior. You may be surprised they all fit in the chart somewhere.



**What do we expect out preschool students to do?** We expect them to **LEARN THROUGH PLAY**. These social-emotional skills that have been identified as essential for success in school: Ability to get along with others – Follow directions – Identify and regulate emotions and behavior – Effectively problem solve to resolve conflict – Persist at a task – Engage in social conversation and cooperative play – Accurately interpret other’s emotions and behavior – Positively assess self and others – Willingness to try new things. Our preschool students learn these skills best through **PLAY**. Structured and unstructured play is the best means to learn these developing skills.

**What are We Teaching?** Preschool teachers are expected to teach social-emotional skills throughout their day during structured activities and/or through “teachable moments”. The HCS Preschool Learning Progressions contain a category for social-emotional skills, which provides teachers an outline to follow, as well as, resources have been uploaded into Blendspace to go along with each bi-weekly theme to be taught. Evidence based practices like, How Does Your Engine Run program, Zones of Regulation,

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Second Step, Power Teaching and The Alert Program, help support our knowledge that children with disabilities learn best when they can associate certain emotions with certain colors (green = happy; red = angry/mad). Adaptions to evidence based programs have been outlined in the learning progressions for our preschool teachers to follow and implement in their classrooms.

*In addition to support social/emotional skills of our preschool population, teachers are expected to have a classroom design, which accentuates the following: organized and decluttered, visual boundaries, individual visual schedules/supports, whole classroom visual supports, classroom rules (which are repeatedly practiced through motions/gestures- Power Teaching Techniques), calm down area with calm down visuals, token economy systems to support positive reinforcement, first/then approach, communication devices, and a well labeled environment which will best support the needs of our preschool population. Social stories, brain breaks (i.e.- yoga, breathing techniques, calming music) and the Second Step curriculum have all been outlined through the Learning Progressions & BlendSpace and preschool teachers are expected to utilize them.*

**Redefining Our Roles.** Including children with challenging behavior in the classroom, requires a shift in perspective and practice. See behavior as an attempt to communicate a message about unmet needs. See children with challenging behavior as in need of being taught skills, not willfully disobedient. See selves as facilitators of social-emotional development, not behavior managers. Understand the students identified in our school-based preschool special needs classrooms need the most intensive interventions. The worst thing we can do is suspend them or have their parents come pick them up (informal suspension) especially if they are trying to GET or GET AWAY from something. This will inadvertently increase the undesired behavior. Instead, continue to work on the development of their social/emotional skills.

**Set your students up to succeed.** Do not expect a 3-year-old to sit quietly for a 20-minute circle time or a trio of five-year-olds to be able to work next to each other without talking. Support your students' growth and development with activities and materials that engage and challenge them but avoid frustration.

**Make routines predictable.** Make sure to prep the children when anything out of the ordinary is planned. Anxiety is a major reason for misbehavior in preschool-aged children; it does not always present itself as worry.

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