

CSA and Schools
Communication and Coordination Regarding Special Education

Best Practice Recommendations

How can local CSA teams and schools work together to ensure that students with disabilities receive services that meet the intent of CSA while maintaining compliance with federal requirements for special education?

Code of Virginia § 2.2-5200: “It is the intention of this law to create a collaborative system of services and funding that is child-centered, family-focused and community-based when addressing the strengths and needs of troubled and at-risk youths and their families in the Commonwealth.”

1. Role of the Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) in special education services

The FAPT can be brought into the planning for a student with a disability at the earliest indication that the student may be in need of supports that fall outside the purview of the public school. The FAPT can work with school personnel to identify non-educational issues that may be negatively impacting the student’s performance in school. Such issues might include difficulties in the family/home, mental health issues not related to the student’s disability, behavioral issues not related to the student’s disability, involvement with the juvenile justice system, etc. The FAPT/MDT can develop an Individual Family Services Plan to identify strategies for assisting the child and/or family. (*Services on the IFSP may be considered “mandated” if the FAPT documents that the services are necessary to prevent a more restrictive placement, e.g., a private day or residential placement.*)

The FAPT can also be utilized in the coordination of planning/services for students with disabilities who are served by other CSA participating agencies. The FAPT can assure that the student’s need for special education services is considered when the student requires an out-of-home placement or transfers from one placement to another. The FAPT can assure coordination with the schools when a student with a disability is returned to his/her home from an out-of-home placement.

CSA Manual, 5.4: “When the Family Assessment and Planning Team are also staffing a child in foster care, every effort should be made to integrate the process of developing the Foster Care Service Plan, the Individual Family Service Plan, and the Individualized Education Plan when a child in foster care receives special education services.”

CSA Manual, 7 (excerpt from the Virginia Department of Education, Superintendent’s Memo #95, May 24, 1995): “...Many local schools have found that their efforts to place special education students in the least restrictive environment have been enhanced by the CSA process. The support provided by other community agencies has often been the

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necessary component to enable children to remain in their community or school. CSA planning has enabled schools to ensure that they are meeting the least restrictive environment provisions of special education. The interagency focus of CSA has also helped many school divisions determine how and when a child in a private day or residential community may be returned to a less restrictive environment in the community.”

CSA Manual, 7: The interagency support is useful before placement in a more restrictive setting such as a private day or residential school and during the annual review of the student’s education plan for students placed in private schools by the local school.

2. Selection of providers/placement options

With the goal to ensure the highest quality of services purchased with CSA Pool Funds, local governments might develop procedures for identifying and contracting with providers who meet certain standards. Such standards might include evidence of prior performance (e.g., through provider evaluations), agreement to abide by models of practice for service delivery, rate restrictions, billing requirements, reporting standards, licensing and/or accreditation status, etc.

When considering providers for private special education services, the involvement of school division personnel is critical in the selection process. The selection/contracting process must also remain flexible to ensure that, for any individual child, the school division is able to access the most appropriate provider to meet the unique needs as identified in the IEP. If a provider not “pre-approved” but is determined to be the appropriate provider for a particular child, there must be a mechanism to allow contracting with that provider.

3. Utilization Management/Utilization Review (UM/UR)

When a CSA system team embraces the IEP review process within its local UM/UR procedures and practices, it eliminates duplication of staff time and effort to accomplish required tasks. It also ensures that each review is focused on educational outcomes as required by IDEA. Acceptance of the federally required frequency for reviews and progress reporting assures alignment with school practices and maximizes the efficiency with which reviews are conducted. A clear process for documenting IEP reviews and incorporating that documentation into CSA data collection should be established. Whether this is accomplished through paper, electronic, or face-to-face communication is a local decision, but teams must ensure that a student’s special education services are not disrupted in any way by requirements for utilization review.

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4. Maximizing use of funds and developing new community services

Local governments have long been encouraged to identify service gaps and barriers to serving children and families and to work collaboratively to develop new community-based services to meet the needs of children, prevent restrictive placements, and ensure maximum use of funds. Within such planning, local CSA governments must be cognizant of the division of responsibilities for funding of special education services between local school divisions and local CSA systems, i.e., the local school division is responsible to fund all IEP services provided in the public schools while CSA is responsible to fund all private day and private residential special education services specified in a child's IEP.

“Community-based services” may include a broad array of services – some of which might be the financial responsibility of the school division while others might be the responsibility of the CSA system. Care must be given to ensure the proper use of funds and consideration of the financial impact on both systems. The goal is to ensure maximum use of all local funds - not to shift costs from one system to another.