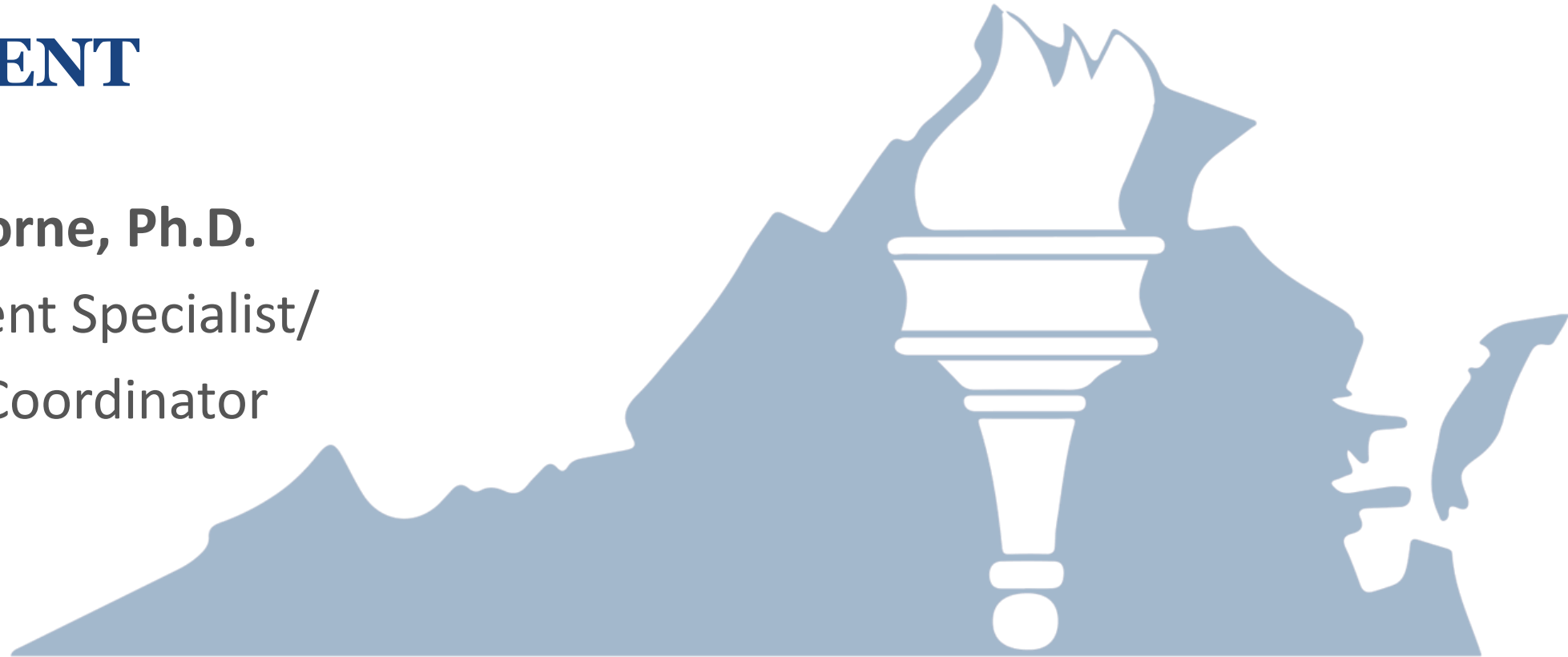


NAVIGATING SPECIAL EDUCATION: SUPPORT FROM VDOE'S OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

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Special Projects Coordinator



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

TAKE A MINUTE...

Without sharing, reflect on your family's involvement or engagement during your childhood. How would you describe it?



Who we are:



- **Tracy Lee**, Coordinator of Family Engagement
- **Dr. Chiquita Seaborne**, Family Engagement Specialist/Special Projects Coordinator
- **Peter Grabowski**, Special Education Parent Ombudsman
- **Lisa Crafton**, Family Engagement Support Specialist

WE HAVE FOUR FUNCTIONS.

1. We engage families directly through providing information, training, resources, and direct assistance.
2. We build capacity with school divisions through the provision of PD and resources in to help them engage their local families more effectively.
3. We provide funding and engage in collaborative partnerships with PEATC, the Center for Family Involvement at VCU, and local Parent Resource Centers to provide multiple avenues through which families in the Commonwealth can receive support.
4. We provide the family perspective to offices throughout the Department of Special Populations, and to the VDOE at large, to ensure that this point of view informs the work of the agency.

THINGS TO KNOW

- The VDOE also has an Office of Parental Engagement that works with all families in the Commonwealth. Our office focuses our efforts solely on families of students with disabilities.
- Departments throughout the VDOE utilize various family engagement frameworks (VTSS Six Components of Family Engagement, Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework, Karen Mapp's Dual Capacity Framework, etc.)
- Each family engagement framework listed here, as well as others not listed here, emphasized some form of relationship building.

PARTNERSHIPS

We partner with the following through both funding and collaborative effort:

- The Parent Educational Advocacy Resource Center (PEATC): positions, trainings
- Center for Family Involvement (CFI) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU): positions, trainings, Family Engagement Network (FEN)
- Parent Resource Centers (PRCs in school divisions): Sub-grant funding, technical assistance

ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING FAMILIES



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SUPPORTING FAMILIES



Ensuring that your child receives a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)



Building and maintaining a solid working relationship with the school team

PARTNERSHIP: VDOE AND PEATC TRAINING COLLABORATIONS

Family
Engagement
Summit

Special Education
Summit (Spanish)

IEP University

Transition
University

Early Childhood
Academy

Building Strong
Parent Advocates

Special Education
Advisory
Committee (SEAC)

Squared Away
(Military)

TRAINING FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

PD for Administrators

- Critical Decision Points for Administrators (*shorter than the teacher version*)
- A Leader's Role in Engaging Families of Students with Disabilities
- Effectively Engaging Families of Students with Disabilities
- An Overview of Discipline Procedures for SWDs Including the Manifestation Determination Review

PD for Teachers

- Critical Decision Points for Families of Children with Disabilities
- Effectively Engaging Families of Students with Disabilities
- An Overview of Discipline Procedures for SWDs
Including the Manifestation Determination Review

PARTNERSHIP: CENTER FOR FAMILY INVOLVEMENT (CFI)

Connect for Success Symposium

Professional Development for Parent
Resource Centers (PRCs)

Family Navigator Program

1:1 Family Support, provided to families
by families.

I'm Determined Youth and Family Summit

The Center for Family Involvement and
the I'm Determined Center



PARENT RESOURCE CENTER ACTIVITIES/PROJECTS FUNDED

Transition Academy Trainings

Special Education-American Sign Language Workshops

Family Resource Fair

Regional Special Education Transition Fair

Neurodiversity Workshops

Occupational Therapy Workshop Series

Products for the PRC lending library

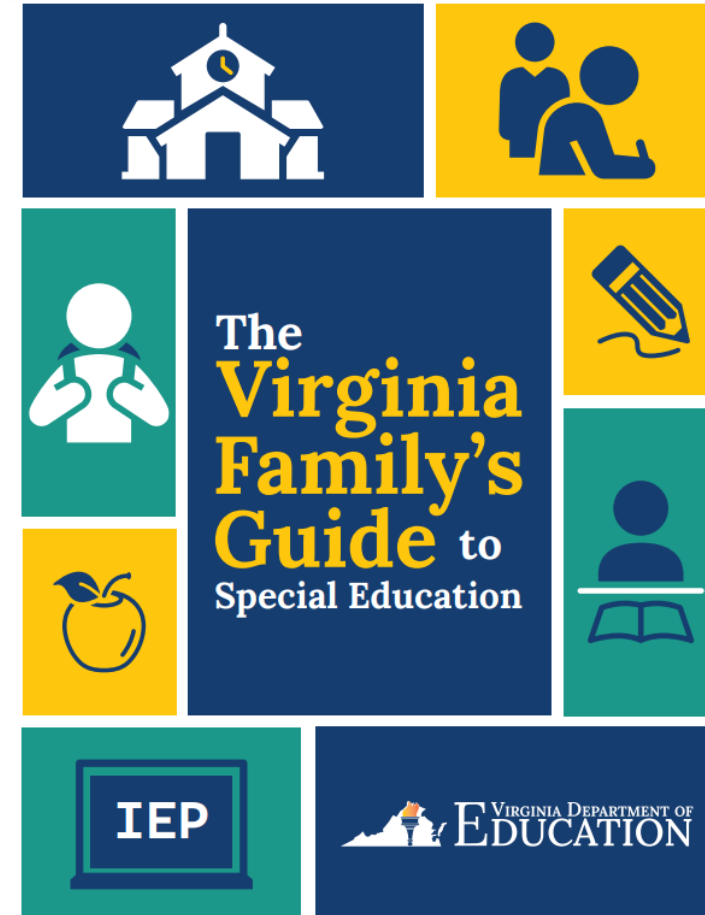
Family Resource Guides

Parental Rights

VIRGINIA'S FAMILY GUIDE FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Available in the following languages:

- [English: The Virginia Family's Guide to Special Education](#)
- [Spanish: Guía de Educación Especial para las Familias de Virginia](#)
- [Vietnamese: Hướng Dẫn Dành Cho Các Gia Đình Tại Virginia về Giáo Dục Đặc Biệt](#)
- [Urdu: ورجینیا فیملی گائیڈ برائے خصوصی تعلیم](#)
- [Arabic: دليل عائلة فرجينيا للتعليم الخاص](#)
- [Amharic: የቨርጅኒያ የልዩ ትምህርት የቤተሰብ መመሪያ](#)



VIRGINIA'S CDP CURRICULUM

Critical Decision Points (CDPs) for Families of Children with Disabilities

Critical decision points

Keys to academic success

Questions to ask



Understanding Your Rights

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates parents' involvement in their child's education. Parents serve a vital role in the decision-making process, and it is important to have an understanding of your Parental Rights. This list is not all-inclusive. Please refer to the [Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities](#) in Virginia for additional information.

You have the right to:

- Advocate for your child without fear of retaliation.
- Receive advance notice/invitation to meetings.
- Have meetings at a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location.
- Audio record eligibility, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and manifestation determination meetings.
- Request to video record meetings. (If there are concerns, ask to review the school division's policy on video recording.)
- Discuss your concerns and have your input considered during meetings.
- Bring and have reviewed any type of documentation.
- Bring individuals, who at your discretion have knowledge or expertise concerning your child and can provide you with supports, and have them assist you during meetings.
- Receive a copy of procedural safeguards document once per year and any time upon request.
- Receive an independent educational evaluation (IEE) when you disagree with the results of a school-based evaluation, at no cost to you.

What is Prior Written Notice?

Prior Written Notice must be provided to you whenever the school division proposes or refuses any action related to the following:

- Identification
- Evaluation
- Educational Placement
- Provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Prior Written Notice must contain the following information:

- Description of the action proposed or refused by the school division
- Explanation of the school division's proposal or refusal to take action
- Description of other options considered and the reasons for their rejection
- Description of the evaluation, assessment, record, or report used as a basis for the action
- Description of other relevant factors
- Statement regarding procedural safeguards protections
- Sources for assistance



OMBUDSMAN SPECIAL EDUCATION



WHAT IS AN OMBUDSMAN?

An Ombudsman is a person who serves as a designated neutral party who advocates for a fair process and provides confidential, informal assistance and support to parents, guardians, advocates, educators, and students with disabilities. The Ombudsman for Special Education serves as a resource to parents in non-legal special education matters.



KEY FUNCTIONS OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- **Independence** - The Ombudsman is independent of the formal dispute resolution options of mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings and serves a key function of reporting to leadership at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) regarding the issues experienced by parties served.
- **Confidentiality** - The Ombudsman does not disclose personal information, discussions, and interactions.
- **Neutrality** - The Ombudsman does not take a side on the issues and serves as an advocate for a fair process.
- **Informality** - There is no formal complaint form or documentation required to access the services of the Ombudsman.

SPECIFIC DUTIES OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- Serve as a source of information and referral regarding state and federal laws and regulations governing special education.
- Provide information and support to parents of students with disabilities to help them understand and navigate the special education process.
- Provide communication strategies to parents and school divisions for resolving disagreements and special education issues.
- Assist parents in developing strategies and informal options to address issues and concerns.
- Promote collaboration and positive communication between parents and school division personnel in addressing special education issues.
- Provide information and resources on available options for dispute resolution, such as mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings when collaboration efforts fail.
- Serve as a resource for disability related information and referrals to available programs and services for individuals with disabilities.
- Identify, track, monitor, and report to the VDOE leadership on suspected systemic patterns of concerns that emerge from constituent contacts regarding special education services in local school divisions to aid in addressing noncompliance with special education laws and regulations.

Parent Ombudsman

Toll Free: (800) 422-2083

Email: SpecialEducationOmbudsman@doe.virginia.gov



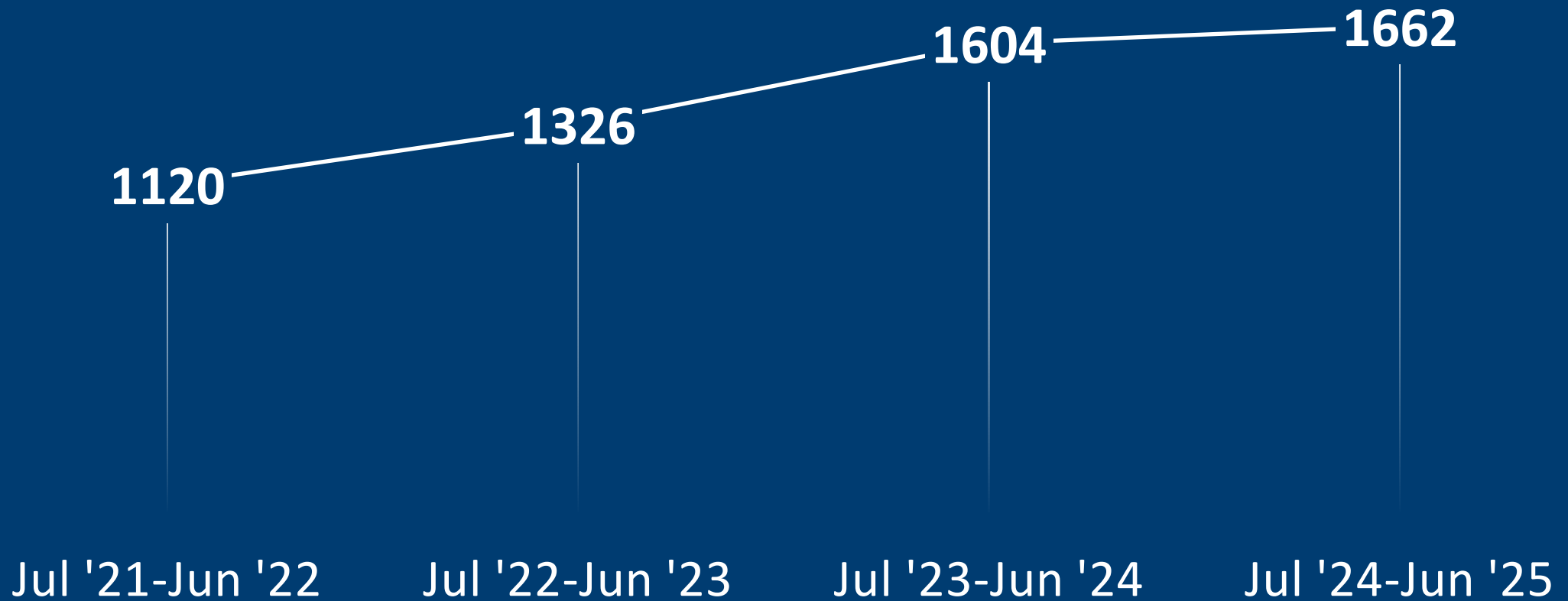
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

The Ombudsman is NOT authorized to:

- Provide legal advice or legal services
- Recommend a specific advocate or special education attorney
- Attend IEP meetings on behalf of or with the family
- Receive formal complaints
- Conduct formal investigations
- Take personnel actions against school staff

REVIEW OF DATA

CONSTITUENT CONTACTS-4 YEAR TREND




TRANSFER OF RIGHTS

At age **18**, rights transfer to your child. It will be important to begin discussing this before your child's 18th birthday.

The IEP team must include a statement in your child's IEP at least one year before reaching age **18** that you and your child have been advised that the rights will transfer.

If your child will not be able to handle this automatic transfer, you will need to take steps to continue to be involved.



How will we discuss disability with our child including the transfer of rights at age 18?

Your child's role in education, as in life, will continue to evolve as maturity and growth occur. Self-determination is an important attribute for all people to possess. It is developed by acquiring a set of skills that help a person understand individual Strengths, Preferences, Interests, and Needs (SPIN).

Helping children understand that we all have strengths and that we all have areas where we need help to be successful is a good first step toward disability awareness. Conversations with your child about the diagnosed disability should:

- Be open, without being overly detailed;
- Be accurate and age-appropriate;
- Name the disability;
- Focus on the disability not being shameful or embarrassing;
- Respond to your child's questions and seek answers to questions if needed; and
- Help to find strengths, preferences, and interests.

The [I'm Determined](#) website provides tools and examples to help your child identify strengths, interests, and preferences, as well as information about how others can assist. In addition, there are regional representatives of the program who can talk to you and show you how to navigate the website and use the tools that are available.

Questions to ask the school:


- How can I begin explaining my child's disability and its potential impact?
- How can my child participate in the development of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to the maximum extent?
- Can my child effectively exercise the right to make educational decisions upon reaching age 18 and whom should I consult for advice in this area if I feel that I still need to be involved in educational decision-making on behalf of my adult child?
- Will I be able to attend IEP meetings after my child's eighteenth birthday?
- Will I be able to assist my child in making informed decisions or serve as my child's advocate after age eighteen?

When to Consider:

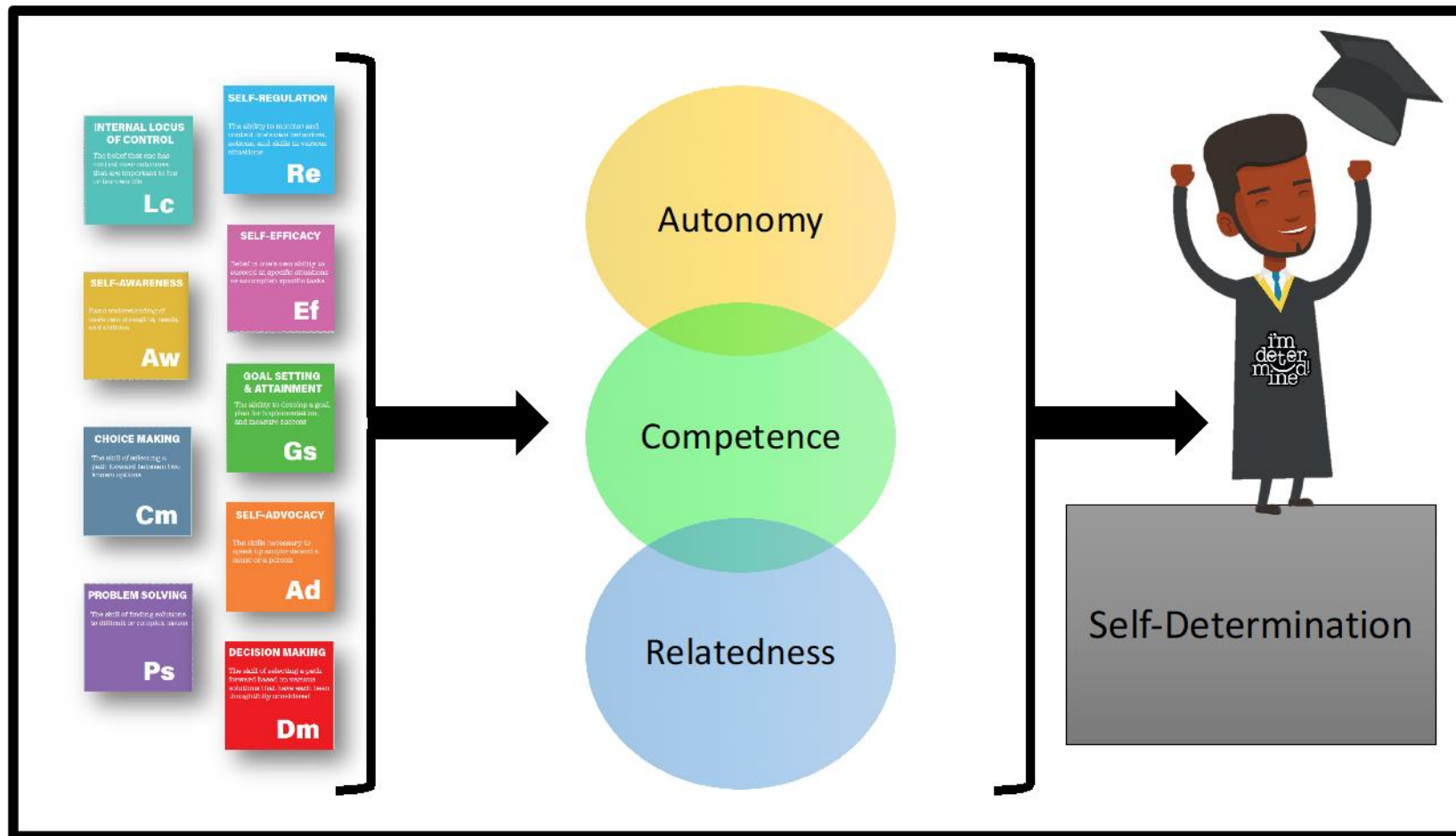
As soon as your child is found eligible for special education services.

Transfer of Rights

At age eighteen, education rights transfer to the child. If your child is not able to independently make decisions, you will need to take steps to continue to be involved. If your child will be able to handle this automatic transfer of rights, it will be important to engage in the preparation process for this milestone by increasing responsibility over a period of time. The IEP Team must include a statement in your child's IEP (beginning at least one year before your child turns 18) that you and your child have been advised that the educational rights transfer to the child upon reaching 18. Please refer to [Transfer of Rights for Students with Disabilities Upon Reaching the Age of Majority in Virginia](#) for more information.



TOOLS FOR SUCCESS



Did you know?

Facilitated IEP- the process of using a facilitator to assist with communication in developing an IEP.

Mediation-can assist parents and school staff when they are in negotiations. A mediator can convene and conduct a meeting to clarify issues, focus on the needs of a child, and explore and evaluate possible solutions in a confidential setting.



FOR FAMILIES



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

INDICATOR 8 PARENT SURVEY

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT INVOLVEMENT SURVEY SY 2024-2025

Access the link on your device or Scan
the QR Code to Complete the Survey

Parent Involvement Survey



Parents who have more than one child receiving special education services with an individualized education program (IEP) should submit one survey for each child by December 12, 2025.



- **New platform** that provides access to English and Spanish versions of the survey.
- **Printable versions** in English and Spanish are available on the VDOE website.

EDUCACIÓN ESPECIAL PARTICIPACIÓN DE LOS PADRES ENCUESTA AÑO ESCOLAR 2024-2025

Acceda al enlace en su dispositivo o escanee el
código QR para completar la encuesta

Encuesta sobre participación de padres



Padres que tienen más de un hijo/a recibiendo servicios de educación especial con un Programa de Educación Individualizado (IEP) deben enviar una encuesta por cada niño antes del 12 de Diciembre del 2025.



Local Advisory Committee

- The *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*, at 8VAC20-81-230.D, state that each school division shall have a local advisory committee for special education that is appointed by each local school board, which shall advise the school board through the division superintendent.
- The [SEACs Guide: A Guide for Local Special Education Advisory Committees in Virginia](#) provides additional information about the regulations and outlines the requirements for membership of the committee, the committee's functions, meeting notice requirements, and meeting frequency.



**SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(SEAC) SELF-PACED TRAINING**

Attention, SEAC Members and Advisors!

PEATC in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education is pleased to offer SEAC trainings aimed at helping SEAC members understand the role of the local Special Education Advisory Committee in **Virginia** and to build a more efficient and effective advisory committee.

These trainings will include information on:

- SEAC in Virginia SPED Regulations
- SEAC Roles and Responsibilities
- Building Your Local SEAC
- Organization Tips for SEACs
- How to be an Effective Advisory Committee



November 3, 2025 - November 23, 2025
REGISTER: tinyurl.com/hs663pmc

The next self-paced session will be January 5, 2026 - Jan 26, 2026
The next live Zoom session will be February 21, 2026



partners@peatc.org | 703-923-0010 | [peatc.org](https://www.peatc.org)

INFORMATION

Subscribe to receive email updates from the Virginia Department of Education.



Trainings- VDOE Website- Information for Families page.

Follow us on X (Formerly Twitter) (@VDOE_SESS) using #FamilyEngagementFriday

CONTACT INFORMATION

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