



# a Family Guide to **Special Education Services**

## **SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITY**

VOLUME 14

# Family Guides for Special Education Services

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## Other MDE Resources

- **General resources for parents:**  
[📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources](https://mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources)
- **Parent Engagement and Support**  
[📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families](https://mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families)  
[📞 601.359.3498](tel:601.359.3498)
- **Procedural Safeguards: Your Family's Special Education Rights**  
[📌 mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution](https://mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution)

# SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITY (SCD)

## SCD Definition

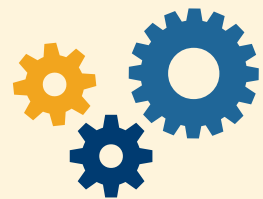
For a student to be classified as having a **Significant Cognitive Disability (SCD)**, **all** of the following must be true:

- A.** The student demonstrates significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels (as determined by that student’s comprehensive assessment) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations.
- B.** The student requires extensive direct instruction in both academic and functional skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.
- C.** The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is not the result of excessive or extended absences or primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities; emotional-behavioral disabilities; specific learning disabilities; or social, cultural, or economic differences.

A student’s level of cognitive ability and adaptive skills may significantly prevent achievement of the academic content standards that have been identified as the standards of learning and achievement for students in Mississippi’s public schools. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), such a student may meet the criteria listed below to be classified as a student with a “significant cognitive disability.”

“Significant cognitive disability” is not a new, separate category of disability. A small number of students who have been diagnosed within one or more of the thirteen existing categories of disability (e.g., autism, multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injury, etc.) as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act may fall into the “significant cognitive disability” category due to the severity of their disability.

Taken from [sos.ms.gov](http://sos.ms.gov)



To be considered SCD, the child must meet all three of the standards listed on the Individualized Education Program (IEP).



# Evaluation Requirements

To be considered SCD, a student should demonstrate deficits in adaptive behavior with scores that are at least 2½ to 3 standard deviations below the mean in at least two of the following adaptive skill domains.



- **Conceptual skills**—Receptive and expressive language, reading and writing, money concepts, self-direction.



- **Social skills**—Interpersonal, responsible, self-esteem, follows rules, obeys laws, is not gullible, avoids victimization.



- **Practical skills**—Personal activities of daily living such as eating, dressing, mobility, and toileting; instrumental activities of daily living such as preparing meals, taking medication, using the telephone, managing money, using transportation, and doing housekeeping activities; occupational skills; and maintaining a safe environment.

The IEP team cannot make its determination of whether the student has a SCD solely on any of the following exclusionary factors:

- A disability category or label
- Poor attendance or extended absences
- Native language/social/cultural or economic differences
- Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
- Academic and other services the student receives
- Educational environment or instructional setting
- Percent of time receiving special education
- English Learner (EL) status
- Low reading level/achievement level
- Student's anticipated disruptive behavior
- Impact of student scores on the accountability system
- Administrator decision
- Anticipated emotional distress
- Need for accommodations (e.g., assistive technology/augmentative and alternative communication) to participate in the assessment process

If a student meets the criteria for having SCD, the student’s instruction will be based on the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (MS-AAAS) and the student should participate in the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program-Alternate (MAAP-A).

## Participation in Statewide Assessment Program

- This student is not required to participate in statewide assessments as she or he is over 18 years of age.
- This student meets the criteria for SCD and is under 8 years of age.

### Significant Cognitive Disability (SCD) Determination

To be classified as a student having a significant cognitive disability, ALL of the criteria below must be true.

<input type="radio"/> Yes  <input type="radio"/> No	The student demonstrates significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels (as determined by that student’s comprehensive evaluation) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations and modifications.
<input type="radio"/> Yes  <input type="radio"/> No	The student requires extensive direct instruction in both academic and functional skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.
<input type="radio"/> Yes  <input type="radio"/> No	The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is neither the result of excessive or extended absences nor is primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, specific learning disabilities or social, cultural, or economic differences.

- The student **MEETS** the criteria for having a significant cognitive disability.
- The student **DOES NOT MEET** the criteria for having a significant cognitive disability.

For students classified as having an SCD, indicate the standards in which the student is instructed.

- This student meets the criteria for SCD and receives all instruction on alternate academic achievement standards.
- This student meets the criteria for SCD and receives instruction on grade-level standards in the following content area(s): \_\_\_\_\_

# SCD Determination Guidance Document

The SCD Determination Guidance Document can be downloaded at [mdek12.org/sites/default/files/scd-determination-guidance-document-revised\\_2\\_aug2017.pdf](http://mdek12.org/sites/default/files/scd-determination-guidance-document-revised_2_aug2017.pdf)

<p><b>SCD Standard 1:</b> The student demonstrates <b>significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels</b> (as determined by the student’s comprehensive evaluation) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations and modifications.</p>		
The student has an IQ score or developmental level two or more standard deviations below the mean.	True	False
The student is <b>not able</b> to exhibit adaptive skills that would allow him/her to function independently and safely in daily life.	True	False
With accommodations/modifications in place, the student is <b>not able</b> to participate in and make progress in the standard academic curriculum.	True	False
The student meets the criteria for SCD Standard 1 (must mark True to all statements in order to mark Yes).	Yes	No
<p><b>SCD Standard 2:</b> The student consistently requires extensive direct instruction in both <b>academic and functional</b> skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.</p>		
The student consistently requires extensive repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or a transient nature, in both academic and functional skills in order to gain educational benefit.	True	False
The student uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.	True	False
The student meets the criteria for SCD Standard 2 (must mark True to all statements in order to mark Yes).	Yes	No
<p><b>SCD Standard 3:</b> The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is neither the result of excessive or extended absences nor is primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, specific learning disabilities, or social, cultural, or economic differences.</p>		
The student’s absences may be excessive and/or extended, but are not the primary reason the student cannot complete the standard academic curriculum.	True	False
The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is not primarily due to one of the following: Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disability, Language/Speech Impairment, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment and/or Other Health Impairment	True	False
The student meets the criteria for SCD Standard 2 (must mark True to all statements in order to mark Yes).	Yes	No

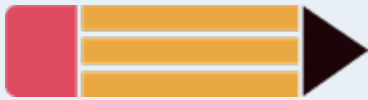
## Does the student meet the criteria for all three (3) SCD standards?



The student is considered as having a Significant Cognitive Disability. The student’s instruction should be based on the Alternate Academic Achievement standards and will participate in the MAAP.



The student is **not** considered as having a Significant Cognitive Disability. The student’s instruction should be based on the MS College and Career Ready Standards and will participate in the MAAP.



## Helpful Vocabulary

**Accommodation**—Tool that enables a student with a disability to better access the general curriculum. Some accommodations are applicable to instruction only (for example, an assignment that is shortened but still addresses the state standard); others are permitted for both instruction and assessment (for example, change in formatting or timing).

**Adaptive behavior**—Behavior that is essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.

**Alternate assessment**—An alternate assessment is appropriate for students for whom an accurate measure of performance and progress cannot be obtained using the standard.

**Extensive direct individualized instruction**—Concentrated instruction designed for and directed toward an individual student. This type of instruction is needed by a student with SCD to acquire knowledge and skills in content. A student with SCD is likely to need this extensively to apply knowledge and skills in multiple contexts.

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**—Foundational requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) stipulating that special education and related services must be provided at public expense (that is, without charge to parents), meet state requirements, include an appropriate education that leads to outcomes such as employment or higher education, and conform to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) prepared for the student.

**Inclusion**—The practice of educating children with disabilities in the general education classroom. Inclusion in special education programs is an important part of the continuum of special education placements required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In an inclusion classroom, a student with disabilities feels included, accepted, and makes friends, and the student's peers learn to better understand their classmate's disabilities.

**Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)**—A law that makes available a free public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)**—A document written for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with state and federal policies.

**Itinerant services**—Special education services provided in a community preschool program. These services may be provided directly to the child or as consultative services to the early childhood teacher.

**Mississippi Alternate Assessment of Extended Curriculum Frameworks (MAAECF)**—This alternate assessment process is specifically designed for students who meet the criteria to be classified as SCD.

**Modification**—Adjustment to an assignment, test, or activity in a way that significantly simplifies or lowers the standard or alters the original measurement. Modifications change what a student is taught or expected to learn, and most are applicable to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

**No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)**—Passed by Congress in December 2001, the NCLB addresses the inclusion of all students in state and district assessment and accountability systems, including students with disabilities.

**Pervasive**—Present across academic content areas and across multiple settings (including school, home, and community).

**Related services**—Additional support services that a child with disabilities requires, such as transportation, occupational, physical, speech pathology services, interpreters, medical services, etc.

**Significant cognitive disability (SCD)**—In order for a Significant cognitive disability (SCD)—In order for a student to be classified as having a significant cognitive disability, **all** of the following criteria must be true:

- The student demonstrates significant cognitive deficits and poor adaptive skill levels (as determined by that student’s comprehensive evaluation) that prevent participation in the standard academic curriculum or achievement of the academic content standards, even with accommodations and modifications.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction in both academic and functional skills in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of those skills.
- The student’s inability to complete the standard academic curriculum is neither the result of excessive or extended absences nor is primarily the result of visual, auditory, or physical disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, specific learning disabilities, or social, cultural, or economic differences.

**Speech-language pathologist (SLP)**—A speech-language pathologist works to prevent, assess, diagnose, and treat speech, language, social communication, cognitive communication, and swallowing disorders in children and adults.

**Specially designed instruction (SDI)**—Universally required component that defines special education and stipulates that students with disabilities receive instruction that includes changes in content, methodology, and/or delivery. It is not dependent on setting and is a primary responsibility of special education professionals.

**Substantially adapted materials**—Various classroom and other materials that have been altered in appearance and content from the materials that peers without disabilities use for instruction or assessment.





# Ways to Help at Home

## Functional Skills

Taken from Webster, Jerry. "Functional skills: Skills to help special education students gain independence." ThoughtCo, Aug. 25, 2020, [thoughtco.com/functional-skills-for-students-independence-3110835](https://www.thoughtco.com/functional-skills-for-students-independence-3110835).

Functional skills are those skills your child needs to live independently. We can separate the functional skills as:

### A. Life skills

The most basic of functional skills are those skills that we usually acquire in the first few years of life: walking, self-feeding, self-toileting, and making simple requests. Children with developmental disabilities, such as Autism Spectrum Disorders and significant cognitive or multiple disabilities often need to have these skills taught through modeling, breaking them down, and the use of Applied Behavior Analysis.



### B. Functional academic skills

Living independently requires some skills which are considered academic, even if they do not lead to higher education or the completion of a diploma. Those skills include:

- **Math skills**—The functional math skills include telling time, counting and using money, balancing a checkbook, measurement, and understanding volume. For higher functioning students, math skills will expand to include vocationally oriented skills, such as making change or following a schedule.
- **Language arts**—Reading begins as recognizing symbols, progressing to reading signs (stop, push), and moves on to reading directions. Many children with disabilities may need to have reading texts supported with audio recordings or adults reading. By learning to read a bus schedule, a sign in a bathroom, or directions, a child with disabilities gains independence.

### C. Community-based learning skills

The skills a child needs to succeed independently in the community often must be taught in the community. These skills include using public transportation, shopping, making choices in restaurants, and crossing streets at crosswalks. Too often parents, with the desire to protect their children with disabilities, over-function for their children and unknowingly stand in the way of allowing their children to acquire the skills they need.



### D. Social skills

Social skills are usually modeled, but for many children with disabilities, they need to be carefully and consistently taught. To function in the community, your child needs to understand how to interact appropriately with different members of the community, not only family, peers, and teachers.



## What are life skills?

Life skills include a wide range of knowledge and skills that provide children with important tools to help them to handle daily tasks in their lives and develop into active and productive members of their communities. Life skills also serve the important function of preparing children to take action in situations where adults may not be around to help. Life skills are not innate but can be learned and are a crucial part of education for children with special needs to prepare them for the day-to-day challenges of participating in their community and workplace and feeling independent at home.



The three major life skill areas are daily living skills, social skills, and occupational skills.

**A. Daily living skills.** Daily living skills encompass various tasks needed for independent adult living.

- **Handling money**—Counting money, shopping, paying bills, and managing a bank account
- **Housekeeping**—Performing housekeeping and home maintenance tasks
- **Self-care**—Performing proper grooming and hygiene, washing, and storing clothing
- **Safety awareness**—Identifying danger and respecting emergency procedures
- **Meal preparation**—Buying and storing food, preparing meals, and demonstrating appropriate eating habits

**B. Social skills.** Social skills allow individuals to get along with others and participate in society.

- **Self-awareness**—Identifying emotions, needs, and appropriate methods to deal with stress
- **Social responsibility**—Demonstrating appropriate behavior and respect towards others, recognizing authority, and following instructions
- **Travel**—Getting around the community and following travel safety procedures
- **Problem Solving**—Recognizing difficulties and seeking assistance
- **Communicating**—Speaking, listening, and responding appropriately to others

**C. Occupational skills.** Occupational skills prepare students for meaningful work to their highest potential.

- **Appropriate work habits**—Maintaining punctuality and regular attendance, following directions and observing regulations, helping others
- **Job-seeking**—Identifying requirements of appropriate jobs, investigating local occupational opportunities, applying and interviewing for jobs
- **Occupational skills**—Job training and vocational education

# Adaptive Functioning

Adaptive functioning is affected by three basic skill sets:

## A. Conceptual



This includes reading, numbers, money, time, and communication skills. Some at-home activities that would support conceptual learning are:

- Reading to your child
- Playing the game “I Spy”
- Practicing with directional words such as in/out and up/down
- Counting objects around the home
- Describing items according to size, weight, volume, height, length, speed, temperature, etc.
- Producing rhyming words
- Sorting items into categories such as foods, clothes, shapes, etc.
- Sorting laundry by colors
- Matching and pairing socks
- Using sidewalk chalk to write letters and shapes
- Cooking while following a recipe
- Naming coins and bills

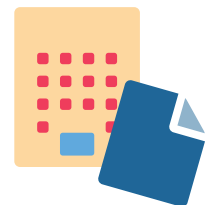
## B. Social



These skills, which will help your child get along well with others, include understanding and following social rules and customs, obeying laws, and detecting the motivations of others in order to avoid victimization and deception. Some at-home activities to support social skills learning are:

- Playing turn-taking games
- Making eye contact
- Asking for help
- Following directions
- Greeting others
- Using names
- Sharing materials
- Asking for help
- Waiting patiently
- Using appropriate voice tone and volume
- Making an apology
- Listening actively

## C. Practical life skills



These are the skills needed to perform the activities of daily living, including feeding, bathing, dressing, occupational skills, and navigational skills. Some at-home activities to support practical life skills learning are:

- Washing the hands, face, and body
- Feeding self
- Preparing a meal together
- Getting dressed
- Dressing for the weather
- Brushing teeth
- Using the restroom independently
- Feeding a pet
- Putting away toys
- Making the bed
- Opening and closing lids
- Blowing the nose

## Adaptive Skills

Adapted from [therapytravelers.com/strategies-teaching-students-intellectual-disabilities](https://therapytravelers.com/strategies-teaching-students-intellectual-disabilities)

Many children with intellectual disabilities need help with adaptive skills—the skills needed to live, work, and play in the community. Teachers and parents can help a child work on these skills at both school and home. Some of these skills include:

- Communicating with others
- Taking care of personal needs (dressing, bathing, going to the bathroom)
- Health and safety
- Home living (helping to set the table, cleaning the house, or cooking dinner)
- Social skills (manners, knowing the rules of conversation, getting along in a group, playing a game)
- Reading, writing, and basic math
- Skills that will help them in the workplace as the child gets older.

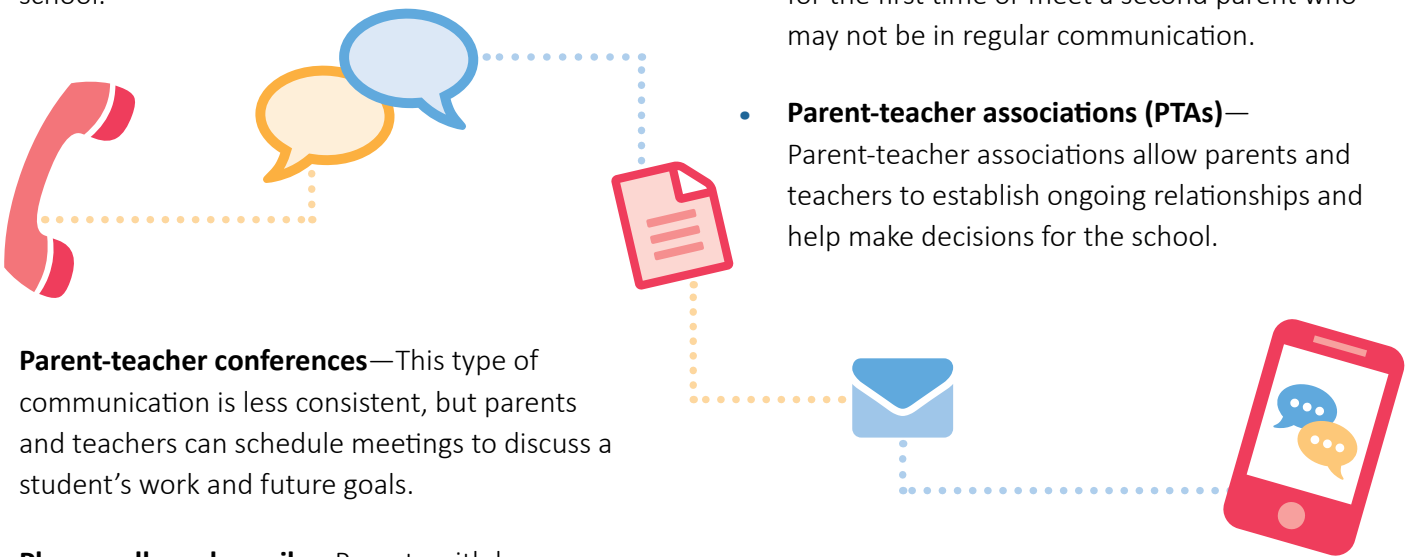


# Successful Parent-Teacher Communication

Adapted from Parent-Teacher Communication: Strategies for Effective Parent Inclusion & Engagement | American University—[soeonline.american.edu/blog/parent-teacher-communication](http://soeonline.american.edu/blog/parent-teacher-communication)

Communication is key to a successful inclusion classroom. Parents, general education teachers, and special educators can try the following tactics for successful parent-teacher communication:

- Regular in-person communication**—This type of communication works great for parents who typically drop off and pick up their children from school.
- Open houses**—Most schools host annual open houses where parents can visit their children’s classrooms. This allows teachers to meet parents for the first time or meet a second parent who may not be in regular communication.
- Parent-teacher associations (PTAs)**—Parent-teacher associations allow parents and teachers to establish ongoing relationships and help make decisions for the school.
- Parent-teacher conferences**—This type of communication is less consistent, but parents and teachers can schedule meetings to discuss a student’s work and future goals.
- Phone calls and emails**—Parents with busy work or personal schedules may not have the opportunity to go to the school or schedule conferences. These parents may be easier to reach via phone or email. Phone calls and emails can also be used by teachers to regularly communicate with parents between conferences.
- Text messages**—Some teachers use mass text messages or special messaging apps to communicate with parents. Several text services, such as Remind, cater specifically to teachers.
- Homework handouts and newsletters**—Teachers can create handouts containing information about homework and other tasks for students to take home. Teachers can also write weekly or monthly newsletters to update parents on what is going on in the classroom and how they can participate.
- Class websites**—Teachers can create classroom websites to post announcements, homework, and reminders to help ensure they don’t get lost in communication between the classroom and home. Similar methods of communication include social media sites or learning management platforms such as ClassDojo.





## Resources

- Best Buddies International**—A national organization dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of people with intellectual and development disabilities. The intellectual disability community that Best Buddies serves includes, but is not limited to, people with Down syndrome, autism, Fragile X, Williams syndrome, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, and other undiagnosed disabilities.

📍 [bestbuddies.org](http://bestbuddies.org)

☎ 800.892.8339
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**—Find information and resources for people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., definitions, signs, what to do if my child may have an intellectual disability, etc.).

📍 [cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/facts-about-intellectual-disability.html](http://cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/facts-about-intellectual-disability.html)
- National Down Syndrome Congress Programs and Resources**—The leading national resource of support and information for anyone touched by or seeking to learn about Down syndrome, offering resources on a wide array of topics, some created at the center and others shared from trusted sources.

📍 [ndsccenter.org/programs-resources](http://ndsccenter.org/programs-resources)

☎ 800.232.6372
- The ARC for People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**—An organization that promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes. It shares knowledge and conducts trainings and events to help connect communities and inform efforts to broaden inclusion across the country.

📍 [thearc.org/our-initiatives/education](http://thearc.org/our-initiatives/education)

☎ 800.433.5255
- The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) Office of Special Education**—A service-oriented office that seeks to improve the education experience for children with disabilities

📍 [mdek12.org/OSE](http://mdek12.org/OSE)
- Think College**—A national organization—part of the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston—dedicated to developing, expanding, and improving inclusive higher education options for people with intellectual disability. The family resources guide answers some of the most frequently asked questions that families have about college options for students with intellectual disabilities.

📍 [thinkcollege.net/family-resources](http://thinkcollege.net/family-resources)

☎ 617.287.4300
- U.S. Department of Education**—Their mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

📍 [ed.gov](http://ed.gov)
- U.S. Department of Education-Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services**—The mission of the Office of Special Education Programs is to lead the nation's efforts to improve outcomes for children with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families, ensuring access to fair, equitable, and high-quality education and services.

📍 [ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers](http://ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers)

### MDE-specific resources include:

- General resources for parents:**

📍 [mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources](http://mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families/Resources)
- Parent Engagement and Support**

📍 [mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families](http://mdek12.org/OSE/Information-for-Families)

☎ 601.359.3498
- Procedural Safeguards: Your Family's Special Education Rights**

📍 [mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution](http://mdek12.org/OSE/Dispute-Resolution)



# Acknowledgments

