

A Parent's Guide to Separate Site Programs for Minnesota Children with Emotional or Behavior Disorders

Most parents want their children with emotional or behavior disorders to be included in the general classroom as much as possible. At times, however, some children may need placement in a nontraditional school setting, such as a separate site program, for at least brief periods of time. If your child is being considered for placement in a separate site program, you may want to consider the following questions about such placements before making a decision.

What is a separate site program?

A separate site program is a setting other than a traditional school. Separate sites include places such as:

- alternative learning centers
- alternative learning programs
- care and treatment programs, such as residential treatment centers or hospital programs
- chemical dependency treatment programs
- correctional placements
- day treatment programs (mental health)
- schools that serve only children with emotional or behavioral disorders

What can a separate site program offer my child that a regular school can't?

Separate site programs offer supports and programming appropriate for a child with emotional, behavioral, or specific treatment needs. They often have smaller class sizes and may provide more individualized attention or on-site mental health services. Many of these programs emphasize developing positive relationships.

How are decisions made about my child's need for a separate site program?

Decisions can be made in various ways. Parents, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes the parents, or a court may place a child in a separate site program.

Voluntary placement means that you make the decision, often based on a recommendation from a therapist, county social worker, or other professional who works with your child. You may also choose this option based on personal knowledge or research.

IEP team placement means that the IEP team decides that your child needs a separate site program. You are part of the IEP team and are involved in this process. The team may believe that a separate site program is the most effective way to provide your child with a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

Before considering a move to a separate site, the IEP team must consider the use of services to support the child's success in the regular school environment. This might mean considering the use of assistive equipment, special behavior strategies, placement in a resource room in the regular school, or modifying the curriculum.

Unless the IEP team can clearly show that your child's needs cannot be met in the regular school placement, even with supplementary aids and services, your child retains the right to remain in that school. Your child also retains the right to participate in classes and other activities with children who do not have disabilities.

With **court-ordered placement**, the court orders a child into a separate site program. Such placements are made to provide treatment or to ensure the safety of the child or the community.

What should parents consider when choosing a separate site program for a child?

Depending on the situation, you may want to consider asking some of the following questions:

General Questions

- Why is the proposed placement being considered?
- What prevents my child from succeeding in the current setting?
- What else might be tried to help my child succeed in the current setting?
- Has the school completed a functional behavior assessment? If not, will one be completed before making a final placement decision?
- What if I disagree with a proposed placement?

Program Questions

- Can I tour the proposed program and talk with program staff to see how they interact with children and their families?
- Who is served by the program? (i.e., ages, gender, disabilities, methods of placement)
- What is the student-staff ratio?
- What would a typical day be like for my child?
- How does the program accommodate cultural differences?
- Are there clear individual and program goals?
- What is the average length of stay?
- Are there specific requirements for exiting the program?
- What role does the IEP team play in returning my child to regular school?
- What are the outcomes for youth in the program? Can I see program data?
- What training and skills do all teachers have for helping my child reach IEP goals?
- What is the program philosophy regarding behavioral interventions? Is the program based on positive interventions?
- What are the disciplinary sanctions (i.e., suspension, time-out) and under what circumstances are they used?
- Is there a facility-wide behavior plan?
- Can my child have an individualized behavior plan?
- Who is responsible for ensuring the continuation of a prescribed medicine regimen?

Education Questions

- How will my child's IEP be fully implemented in the facility?
- Does each child with an IEP receive the special education instruction and services from licensed personnel?
- How are credits toward graduation calculated, and who maintains a record of credits earned?
- Will the facility credits be accepted by each home school district?
- Who informs the home district about a student's progress?
- Is the academic program provided by a school district or privately contracted teachers?
- Will my child's IEP be accepted? If not, what role do the home district and I play in developing a new IEP?
- Who sets up the IEP meetings, and how is the home district involved?
- Does the program provide the same curriculum and text books as the home district? Why or why not?
- Who is responsible for the transfer of educational records when my child leaves this placement?

Family Involvement Questions

- How often will the facility communicate with me? Through what methods?
- What type of treatment information is the facility unable to share with me? Why?
- How will I be involved in my child's treatment and educational planning?
- For residential programs, what are the limitations on visitation? Will I have a copy of the program policies? Are these policies flexible enough to meet individual needs?
- Will my child be permitted to go home on holidays or weekends? Who makes this decision, and what data support it?

Financial Questions

- Who pays for the placement? (i.e., private insurance, public school, medical assistance, the county, the court)
- Will I have any out-of-pocket expenses?

Transition Back to the Community

- What is the average or expected length of stay for my child in this program?
- What are the program's requirements for my child's return to the community and the regular school?

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- Must students meet specific program behavioral requirements to return to a regular school setting? If so, what are they and what role does the IEP team play in making this determination?
 - What process is used for transitioning my child from the facility to the regular school and community? How soon does the process begin prior to that transition?
 - What follow-up care will be provided?
 - Who will write the discharge plan?

What are some of my rights as a parent?

You have the right to be involved throughout the duration of your child's stay in a separate site facility, unless your parental rights have been terminated through the court. Each facility must provide you with a process for disagreeing with its services, facility rules, visitation, education, medication management, and other policies.

You have the right to:

- be informed about the services your child is receiving
- participate in planning meetings, progress reviews, and IEP meetings
- receive copies of your child's records, unless a physician will not release certain records in order to protect your child's safety or right to confidentiality
- disagree with the placement, unless it has been court-ordered

Conclusion

You know your child best. By understanding what educational options are available and what questions to ask, you can help make decisions that will positively affect your child's success in a separate site placement.

For more information about separate site placements, please contact PACER at 952-838-9000.