

Choosing an Educational Placement for Your Child

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Regardless of a person's mental or physical limitations, all children with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome (CdLS) have the ability to learn. The goal of education should be to educate the child to develop their full potential. The federal law known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that every child is entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) including an Individual Educational Program (IEP) and in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). There are many options available for a child's education. Deciding what is best for your child can be confusing and overwhelming, but with a few suggestions, it is manageable.

The first step is to have the school system evaluate your child - determine the areas of strengths and challenges (what is their best learning style, how to handle behaviors if present, and determine the type of environment that is best for him or her). At the IEP meeting you will talk about your child's strengths and challenges, set measurable goals, look for a setting that fits and that will help your child achieve his/her goals whether it involves communication, academics, social skills, physical skills, getting ready for college, post graduate study, and /or learning work skills.

Once evaluations have been completed and the education team meets, options for the child's education will be discussed. **There are many options available:**

- Inclusion or mainstream class is a placement where your child will be in a regular education class with their age peers. Your child will have a regular education teacher and a special education teacher whose job it is to adjust the curriculum to your child's abilities.
- A resource room is a setting where a child receives instruction outside of the regular education setting with a special education teacher in a small group setting using techniques that are effective for your child. The student is usually with his/her regular education peers for most or some of the day.
- In a self-contained classroom your child is removed from the general school population for all academic subjects and works in a controlled environment with a special education teacher. Self-contained classes provide structure, routine, and appropriate expectations. Students work at their own level.



- While some self-contained classrooms are in the local public school, others are considered out-of-district when the school is outside of your neighborhood. Out-of-district placements do provide specialized instruction to address special learning or behavioral needs. *These schools provide a high degree of structure, routine, and consistency throughout the school day. However, they remove any possibility of interacting with regular education students and are costly to school districts.*
- *Sometimes a private setting is considered and is paid for by the school district if there is no other placement in which the child will receive an education designed to meet any unique educational needs. Some parents may opt to pay for a private school.*
- Some children with CdLS require a residential setting in which they live at the school they are attending and receive around the clock care. For some children with severe medical needs, their education may be in a hospital setting.

Deciding which is right for your child is based on his/her individualized needs. Ask yourself what kind of setting your child learns best in. Parents have a lot of input into their child's education since they know if they respond best to rigid schedules and strict discipline or if they blossom with hands-on projects and move at their own pace. You know whether your child has friends that they want to socialize with or whether the mainstream has been unfriendly or dangerous. Does your child enjoy different teachers or prefer the consistency of the same teacher? Research shows that children learn best in the LRE. For some that would be close to home with their general education peers. For others it might be a self-contained setting.

The following are some tips in searching for an appropriate school:

Look at the overall environment. Is the school doing what they say they will? If they are practicing inclusion, are the supports in place for the child in the classroom with the necessary curriculum adjustments. If your child needs a quiet space to calm down, will it be provided, and how? Do teachers use a variety of instructional methods? Are there school-wide projects that can include the needs of your child?

Ask about the principals background and experience with special education (they are largely responsible for the special education programs in the school) and ask the same about the staff, teachers and paraprofessionals. If your child needs close supervision, ask who will be responsible. How are teachers trained and tracked? If your child has both a regular education teacher and a special education teacher, how do they communicate? Do they team teach or is your child taken out of the



classroom? Do they meet often to discuss your child's progress?

Ask your child's teacher about assessment, instruction, and evaluation regarding your child's learning needs. What are the assessments and what do they do with the results? Are the results used to determine instructional needs? Are evaluations informative and ongoing or just at the end of units?

It is important for family and school staff to be working together. Does the school have open communication between the family and school outside report card times, either

through a notebook, phone calls, email or text? Does the school staff ask for input from the family? Most importantly, does the school feel inviting to you and your child and do you see a happy developing child come home from school every day?

In conclusion, you need to advocate for your child. You know him/her best and can gauge what setting would be the most productive, beneficial and stimulating place for your child to learn in. Not every school can provide services equally, which is why it's important to interview more than one placement. Public and private schools both have services to offer. There is not one best solution. The placement should be monitored closely to determine what is or isn't working.

Remember that your child's placement is not permanent. If the placement is not working, your child's behavior is increasing, or he/she is not making progress, you can request that the educational team meet and reevaluate the placement. All children are constantly developing: what placement works this year may not be beneficial the next year.

