

First Steps for Parents When School Problems Are Observed (Not Required by IDEA)

What are the first steps for parents when school problems are observed? What is meant by “pre-referral” or “problem-solving?”

If a student is having unusual difficulty in school the parent should discuss the situation with the teacher and other school personnel. Although not a requirement of IDEA, most schools have a problem-solving team which works with families in reviewing and solving problems that affect school performance before beginning a formal process of referral for special education and related services as described in IDEA. Problem-solving activities or strategies used by the regular education teacher to address the child’s difficulty may consist of changes in the physical environment, changes in instructional approaches, short-term remedial activities, peer tutoring, or behavioral management plans.

Who serves on the problem-solving team?

Members of the problem-solving team usually include the child’s teacher, a building level administrator, guidance counselor, the school psychologist, social worker, or consultant. The special education teacher may also be included. Most schools have a problem-solving team that includes general education staff member/s.

What do parents need to know about problem-solving efforts?

- Parents should request to participate in all meetings of the team.
- Parents should receive ongoing information regarding the child’s progress with the strategies in place.
- Parents should provide documentation and results of previous interventions tried.
- Length of time interventions will be attempted prior to referral for consideration for special education. (Time is usually from three to nine weeks)
- Who will implement the intervention, needed materials, frequency, and setting of the interventions.
- Date for follow-up meeting to review progress.
- Parents can stop problem-solving at any time and request referral for consideration for special education and related services. The school must provide parents with a formal notice of their agreement or disagreement.

Prior to, during, or after a period of “problem-solving” efforts in the regular classroom, the child may be referred for consideration for special education and related services.

Excerpted from the LDA **ADVOCACY HANDBOOK: A Parent’s Guide for Special Education** available from the [Bookstore](#) and offered free of charge to [LDA members](#).