WHO PAYS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES?

If your child meets eligibility criteria, there is no charge to your family for special education and related services. Children between the ages of 3 and 21 who are determined to be in need of special education are guaranteed a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) by Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The word “free” means that your child has the right to go to school at public expense and without charge to your family. What is an “appropriate” program is determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team.

An appropriate program is not always the best program available. “Appropriate” means that the program is designed to enable your child to make progress on the academic, social, and behavioral goals established in the IEP. Appropriate also means that the program meets your child’s abilities and age. For example, your child should not be put in a classroom with other students who are substantially older or younger, regardless of if all students in the classroom have the same level of ability. Sometimes an appropriate program exists within the public school system; other times the IEP team will recommend an outside or private placement. If the IEP team recommends that your child receive services from a private or independent service provider as an IEP service, your school district will be responsible for paying for that provider as a requirement of FAPE.

Funding for special education services comes from the federal government and from your state and district. To help defray some of the cost, Part B of IDEA allows, and indeed encourages, public schools to use public benefits or insurance (for example, Medicaid) to help pay for some of the costs of providing special education and related services, if a parent agrees. The parent cannot be required to sign up for or enroll in public benefits or insurance, however, and cannot be forced to give consent.

You may, of course, choose to supplement the special education services your child receives with private pay services. When deciding whether to supplement services, think about how much therapy is appropriate for your individual child’s age and ability. Ask yourself if your child has the attention span or tolerance for added service hours above and beyond the school day. If you choose to supplement special education services with private ones, it is a good idea to make sure everyone working to help your child knows what other providers are
doing so that the services complement each other.

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