

THE MORE YOU KNOW:

SCHOOL SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS WITH CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE

Information for families of students with CHD

Students with congenital heart disease (CHD) may have medical and learning needs that affect their school day. Schools can provide supports to help students with CHD learn safely and successfully.

In the United States, public schools are required to provide supports so students with disabilities can receive a free and appropriate public education.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH CHD

Congenital heart disease (CHD) is a heart condition that is present at birth. Differences in how the heart is shaped or how it pumps blood can affect how much oxygen reaches the brain. This can influence **neurodevelopment**, which means how the brain grows, learns, and functions over time.

At school, some children with CHD may experience:

- Physical limitations, such as getting tired more easily or having lower stamina
- Temperature regulation challenges, especially in very hot or very cold weather
- Risk of dehydration, especially for children who take certain heart medications (such as diuretics, which help remove extra fluid from the body)
- Learning challenges, including difficulties with attention, fine motor skills (like writing), or learning new information
- Anxiety or stress, especially related to health or school demands
- Difficulty making or keeping friendships
- Missed school days due to medical appointments or hospital stays

Not every child with CHD will experience these challenges. Supports can be adjusted to fit each child's needs.

UNDERSTANDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Special education services help students with disabilities access learning in ways that work best for them. These supports may include changes to how lessons are taught, extra help from school staff, or therapy services.

There are two main ways students with CHD may receive school supports:

- Section 504 Plan
- Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Check out the table on the next page for more information!

HOW TO REQUEST SCHOOL SUPPORTS (504 PLAN OR IEP)

You can request school supports at any time.

Steps to get started:

1. **Contact the school:** Reach out to the school's special education coordinator or principal. Submit a written request asking for an evaluation.
2. **Share medical information:** Provide documentation from a healthcare provider. This may include a note from your child's cardiologist or a recent neuropsychological evaluation.
3. **School evaluation:** If your child is being evaluated for an IEP, the school must complete a full evaluation within a required timeframe (often about 60 days).
4. **Team meeting:** You will meet with a school team to review results and decide on eligibility and supports.

Section 504 Plans

What is it?

A Section 504 Plan is a legal plan under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It provides accommodations so a student with a disability can fully participate in the general education classroom.

Who can receive it?

Any child with a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (e.g., walking, learning, breathing, concentrating)”

Common Accommodations for students with CHD

Ability to self-limit physical activity

Permission to drink water and use the restroom as needed

Extra textbooks or materials for home use

Temperature supports, such as access to shade, air conditioning, or warm clothing

Preferential seating and gentle attention reminders

Extra time for assignments and tests

Emergency health plans and staff awareness of medical needs

Pro-tip

After supports are in place, check in regularly to see if they are helping. Needs can change over time, and plans can be updated.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

What is it?

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a plan created under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is for students who need specialized instruction or related services because a disability affects their educational performance.

Who can receive it?

To receive an IEP, a student must meet criteria under one of IDEA's disability categories and need special education services.

Many students with CHD qualify under Other Health Impairment.

Some students may also qualify under learning disability or multiple disabilities, especially if they have attention difficulties or learning challenges.

Common Services for students with CHD

Specialized instruction, such as reading or math support

Speech therapy, occupational therapy, or physical therapy

Behavioral supports, when needed

Assistive technology, such as tools to help with writing or organization

Social skills support or access to the school counselor

Tutoring or extra instruction when school is missed due to medical care

Many students with an IEP also receive accommodations similar to those listed under a 504 Plan.

IF YOU NEED MORE HELP

If the school does not complete an evaluation or provide needed supports, you can:

- Contact your state's [Parent Training and Information Center](#)
- Seek help from an educational advocate, who understands education laws and student rights
- Ask if your child's cardiac neurodevelopmental program has an educational specialist who can help guide the process

You are not alone. Support is available to help your child succeed at school.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[The US Department of Education](#)

[Conquering CHD Back to School Resource Guide](#)

[Conquering CHD Webinar - Navigating K-12 Education System with CHD](#)