



Sand Hill School

The Silicon Valley school where learning differences are considered superpowers

School Transition Guide

A resource to assist families in preparing for the process of transitioning from Sand Hill School

TRANSITION TEAM

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Comprehensive and integrated services for
learning differences and mental health
Supporting children, teens, young adults and families

Sand Hill School at CHC
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Is my student ready to transition?

Transitioning from Sand Hill School

The goal of Sand Hill School is to help your student develop the building blocks necessary for a successful transition to a more traditional school setting. The transition process at Sand Hill School begins from the moment of enrollment and continues until your student is placed in a new school. The number of years your student spends at Sand Hill depends upon the complexity of a student's challenges, their responsiveness to our program and the availability of other school placements that meet their needs. Sand Hill School's approach represents a systematic process to build fundamental skills for long-term success. Once your student develops these skills and builds confidence, Sand Hill School provides a transition program to facilitate each student's placement into their next school. Deciding on just when your student should transition is a school/family decision that is both art and science and involves a number of critical factors:

- Development of academic competency and confidence
- Family's desires
- Degree of ongoing support each student will require
- Timeline for selecting and applying to a private or public school

Sand Hill support with the transition process

Ultimately, the transition decision is yours. We provide support so you can make the best decision for you and your family. Our teachers and specialists collaborate with you to determine when your student is ready to transition and the school environment that will be optimally supportive. Sand Hill School administration has relationships with many private schools in the area and actively supports each student's transition process.

Sand Hill School transition support includes:

- Counseling with Sand Hill staff to determine transition readiness
- The Sand Hill School Transition Guidebook (also available online)
- Information about potential placement schools provided by the Sand Hill team
- Preparing students for interviewing with admissions officers (typically for 8th grade students)

What is the timeline for the transition process?

Ideally, parents begin the process of transition approximately 18 months ahead of actually leaving Sand Hill School. So, for example, if a student is going to a new school in the fall of 2025, the transition process listed below would begin in February of 2024.

Parent Meeting

February, approximately 17 months prior to transition

- Transition Coordinator to explain in more depth the Transition Process
- Transition Guidebook disseminated; parents begin to fill out a questionnaire in the guidebook.

Spring Parent Conference

May - one year before transition

- Discuss possible transition with your student's case manager/ advisor
- Discuss skill and social-emotional growth to date
- Discuss specific focus areas that still pose potential obstacles to a successful transition
- Case Managers/advisors alert Sand Hill administrative staff to families discussing transition
- Parents register for appropriate testing (ISEE, SSAT, etc) including accommodations

Summer

- Parents begin reviewing school websites gathering information (such as Open House dates)

Fall Transition Meeting

September

- Parent Questionnaire filled in (found in Sand Hill School Transition Guidebook)
- Specific sequence and checklist of transition tasks to be completed by early November
- Information about selecting a public school versus a private school
- Parents begin visiting schools (Open houses, shadowing)

Fall Parent Conference

- Personalized Plan for Transition is discussed and confirmed
- Parents inform Case Manager/Advisor along with the Transition Coordinator about which schools their student will be applying to and providing all paperwork Sand Hill staff will need to fill in.

September 1 – November 1

- Attend appropriate school Open Houses/Tours
- Parents and Sand Hill staff complete their parts of all applications
- Attend testing appointments
- Teachers will provide test-taking strategies and interviewing practice

December

- Make sure that all parts of the application are completed and turned in

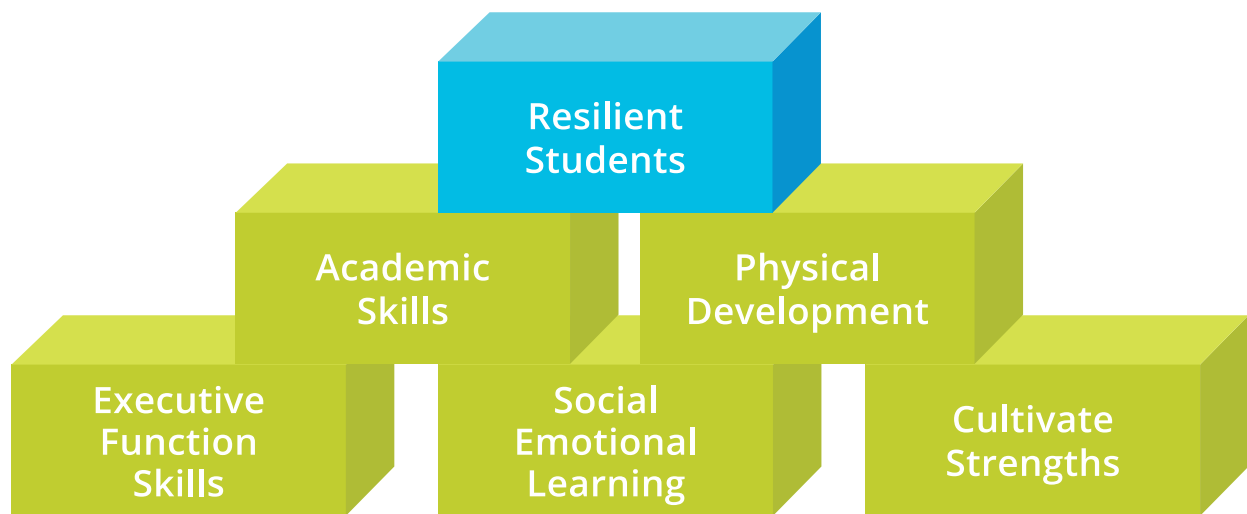
March

- Mid-March admission decisions are made



What fundamental skills are critical to a successful transition?

The foundational building blocks of Sand Hill School place a strong emphasis on **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** and **Executive Functioning (EF)**. There is a growing body of research indicating that SEL is the best indicator of lifelong success, and even academic success. Developing important social-emotional awareness and skills are the most important factors in determining transition readiness for our students.



Skills for a Successful Transition:

Executive Function Skills	Social-Emotional Learning	Identify & Cultivate Strengths	Academic Skills	Physical Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response inhibition • Emotional control • Task Initiation • Sustaining focus on task • Working memory • Prioritizing • Organization of Materials • Goal directed persistence • Cognitive flexibility • Self-monitoring • Self-efficacy 	<p>Self Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify & recognize emotions • Accurate self-perception <p>Social Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective-taking • Empathy • Appreciate diversity • Respect for others <p>Responsible Decision-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying problem choices • Problem-solving • Evaluation & reflection • Ethics & morals • Self Management • Control impulses • Manage stress • Motivate self • Discipline • Set goals • Relationship Management • Positive engagement • Build relationships • Work cooperatively • Conflict Management • Awareness of Non-verbal cues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize & nurture interests and affinities and attributes • Finding activities that stimulate imagination • Maintaining optimism about future • Advocating for strength-based means of expression & engagement 	<p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonemic Awareness Phonics • Fluency • Vocabulary • Comprehension <p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idea generation • Organization • Voice • Sentence fluency • Word choice • Conventions <p>Math</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and Operations • Geometry • Measurement • Data & Probability • Algebraic thinking 	<p>Support student development in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body & spatial awareness • Locomotor skills • Directionality • Stretching • Muscular strength endurance • Cardiovascular endurance • Rhythm & timing • Balance • Small & large object manipulation • Tossing & catching • Coordination • Flexibility • Agility • Throwing for accuracy & distance • Dribbling, passing, kicking, volleying • Movement • Motor control

What factors should our family consider before we select a school?

You've probably learned a lot about the characteristics of a good school during your stay at Sand Hill School—small classes, dedicated teachers, an atmosphere where your student is accepted and supported, and an engaging program. As you begin the search for a transition school, what else should you think about?

Obviously, your student's needs come first, but you may have some wishes as well. It's probably a good idea to sit down with the family and make a list and then delineate which items are absolutely essential and which ones would be desirable but not necessarily essential. This will help you when you visit new schools as virtually no school will be a perfect match for all your desirables. The National Council for Learning Disabilities (www.nclld.org) offers these words of helpful advice and direction.

Practical Matters

- Do you need a school that offers after-hours student care or an extended day program?
- Is the location of the school important?
- Can you drive your student or arrange for other transportation if buses aren't available?
- If you are considering a private school then what, if you add the cost of tuition and the additional expenses you will incur, then will be your family's financial status? (Remember that many but not all private schools offer scholarships.)

Academic Program

- **Will your student learn better in a** more traditional setting using Common Core Curriculum? Or would a school that emphasizes alternative approaches; such as project- or theme-based learning; hands-on teaching be a better fit?
- **What accommodations/modifications does your student require?** Will your student continue to need designated and specialized support services on a regular basis? If you are seeking full inclusion, what expertise and sensitivity will you want your student's teacher to possess?
- **Do you want your student to be in a school where other students** have encountered learning challenges like your student or do you want the setting to be of a more heterogeneous group of students?

School Facilities and Culture

- How important is **technology** embedded into the classroom to you?
- How important is the opportunity to participate in **extracurricular programs** during or after school to your student's overall school experience?
- How important in your decision making are the following: **diversity** among students and teachers, **recognition** and display of all students' achievements, firm **discipline** policy, the **school's philosophy** or mission?
- To what extent is a lot or a little **parent involvement** important to you?

Top of the List: Your Student's Needs

What your student will need to be successful is probably more important than any other factor.

This is a discussion that would be well served by having a directed conversation with your student's advisory teacher or case manager and including an administrator. In this discussion you can talk about how your student learns best, be clear as to what their major learning and/or social-emotional challenges are, and the instructional and response strategies that have helped your student experience more success in school. It's also beneficial to talk with other parents of student with learning differences, who are attending schools you are considering. Find out from them how satisfied they are and whether the needs they expressed are being fulfilled.

How do I select a school that is appropriate for my student?

Each student at Sand Hill School experiences a range of learning challenges so skill levels and educational needs vary widely. We believe there is a school for every student, but not one school for everyone. The types of schools to which our students transition to depends on the student's rate of academic progress, and the level of autonomy in applying the strategies and tools learned at Sand Hill School. These include SEL strategies, executive functioning tools, and self-advocacy. See Appendix, page 20, for the *Sand Hill School Transition Questionnaire*. It's a great way to spark thinking about transition.

There are many online resources available to help with guidelines for selecting an appropriate school. We recommend the site called Great Schools, www.greatschools.org. The information below is reprinted from that site.

Focus on the Four Fit Factors

1. **What Your Student Learns:** These are aspects of your student that affect what subjects and at what level of difficulty your student should be taught at school. These include your student's Basic Learning Capability, other capabilities, and interests.
2. **How Your Student Learns:** These are aspects of your student that affect how a school should teach and interact with your student both in and outside of the classroom. These include your student's learning styles, motivation, physical and mental health challenges, behavior challenges, learning disabilities and disorders, and self-understanding.
3. **Social Issues:** This includes the need for social contact with particular friends from the student's perspective.
4. **Practical Matters:** This includes essential extracurricular activities that may be compelling choice factors for some students.

What does a good school look like?

Support at schools varies widely so it is important to carefully consider the needs of your student as you consider different schools. Here's a handy checklist of characteristics and questions. You may also want to use [Visiting A School Worksheet: What to Ask, What to Look For](#), located in the Appendix.

Characteristics to look for

- **Desirable class size** (most Sand Hill students will likely be more successful in a smaller class)
- **Desirable school size**
- **Instructional methods and philosophy that support learning differences**
- **Progress report system** (report cards, opportunity for personalized parent conferences, etc)
- **Structure** (routines, predictability) vs. unstructured (more student independence, less direct teacher guidance)
- **A positive atmosphere**
- **Use of technology for learning**
- **Diversity** (learning, ethnic, etc)
- **Tuition and financial aid**
- **Coed/all boys/all girls**
- Location and commute time
- Availability of before and after school care/programs
- **Extra-curricular programming** for all students (sports, visual arts, performing arts)
- Proximity to public transportation
- **Learning specialist support**

Questions to ask prospective schools

- **What is the school's philosophy regarding instruction for "different" learners?** Is instruction and student response differentiated based on learning and expression strengths or is it one size fits all?
- **What types of support are available for students with learning differences?**
- **Are teachers mandated to provide documented accommodations** in each of the subject areas?
- **How is technology used to support learning?**

- **What is the class size** for my student's grade level?
- **What is the student/teacher ratio?**
- **What is the homework policy?**
- **How and how often is progress reported?**
- **Are your extracurricular programs open to all students?** (sports, visual arts, performing arts, other)
- **What are the school's expectations regarding parent involvement** at the school?
- **Is there a consistent daily schedule or rotating block schedule?**
- **Can you put me in touch with a parent** who has a student with a learning difference currently attending your school?

Should we select private school or public school?

Choosing a school with the best fit for your student is what is most important, a school where your student feels accepted and supported and where there are services to support success. Here are some comparisons of private and public schools.

	Private Schools	Public Schools
Admission	There is an admissions process for private schools that usually starts with an inquiry and that likely includes an application, shadow experience, student interview, and teacher recommendation. The admissions process is designed to determine whether or not there is a match between your student's learning needs and their environment. The school has a right to refuse admission.	The public school your student can attend is usually the one in your neighborhood. All you need to do is visit the school and complete the enrollment forms. NO public school may refuse to enroll any student who lives in their district. However, you likely will not automatically qualify for special education support simply because you are coming out of Sand Hill School.
Students	The student population at a private school is determined through a selection process. Students at private schools tend to have similar goals and interests.	The student population at a public school usually reflects the demographics of the neighborhood in which it resides. There can be an extensive amount of diversity amongst the student body including learning styles and needs.



	Private Schools	Public Schools
Teachers	Teachers in private schools are not required to have a valid teaching credential, although many private schools prefer credentialed teachers. However, many private school teachers have a graduate degree in a specific area of specialization (i.e. special ed, reading, etc.).	All teachers in public schools must have a valid teaching credential. Teachers are required to accumulate CEU's to advance their professional development so many will have had some advanced training and coursework
Special Needs	Many private schools do not have formalized tiered support for students who learn differently. However, student diversity is a goal in many private schools. Some private schools will admit students they will positively contribute to their school community even if the student has some learning challenges. Some private schools have programs for students with special needs but they may be at an additional cost.	A public school is required to educate every student that enrolls. Public schools are also mandated to provide free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This means that the district is able to provide tiered levels of support but that one must be determined to be eligible for special education services through an assessment process before one can access special services.
Class Size	Class size at public schools vary, but many private schools are able to offer smaller class sizes in comparison to public schools.	Public schools recognize the value of small class sizes, but most districts do smaller class sizes in comparison to public schools.

How does Sand Hill help with private school application?

What Sand Hill School staff will do to support your application to a new school

- **Provide one copy of each of the following to each school you apply to:**
 - Current AIMSWeb benchmark data regarding reading and math
 - Personalized Plan for lower school students
 - Report Card for middle school students
 - Teacher Recommendation
- **Administrative staff will be receptive to Admission personnel calling to get more information about the student.** You may want to insist on signing a release form for this to happen.
- **We will complete the school portion of your student's private school application.** Please provide at least four weeks lead time for this. Given that many private schools have a December 1 admission deadline, this means the portion of a school application the staff needs to fill out should be turned in by November 1.
- **Staff will help prepare your student for the shadow/interview process.**
- **We will provide test-taking strategies for testing required by most private schools** but not direct test preparation skills. Staff will provide resources that focus on test-taking upon your request.

Information about preparing for the shadow/interview process

Plan to talk with your student ahead of time, before they actually visit the school and/or shadows. We will also help to prepare the student here at school. Before the shadow/interview, the student should:

- **Review the school's website for basic information** (depending on the age of your student, you might be facilitating this review).
- **Talk with your student about why they are interested in the school** and ask questions such as, "Why do you think you want to go to this school?" and encourage them to thoughtfully articulate their response to you as practice.

- **Make sure that your student dresses appropriately** for the shadow/interview.
- **Send a thank you note** after the shadow/interview experience.

During the shadow/interview, your student should remember the following guidelines:

- **Be courteous, interested and open with the teacher and/or administrator** with whom you are talking. Have at least one question to ask at the end of the interview.
- **Be courteous, interested and kind with peers** while at the school.
- **Use expected and positive behavior** during the shadow/interview experience.

PLEASE NOTE: *While it is important to be prepared for the shadow/interview experience, it is important that the student's responses do not feel scripted. Teachers and administrators are looking for potential students who show some creativity and a spark of individuality that provides a window into the student's personality. We will help to prepare your student for this experience, but it is also helpful for you to talk informally with your student about their interests, strengths, and challenges so that they are ready to articulate that to a teacher or administrator.*

Information about entrance assessments for private schools

ISEE (INDEPENDENT SCHOOL ENTRANCE EXAM)

Many private schools require a test called the Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE). Some private schools require that students complete this test as part of the admissions process for grades 5 and above. Other private schools require the ISEE below grade 5. It is important to know what the private school to which you are applying requires.

If you are considering transition, it is important to register for the ISEE testing in the summer. In doing so, you will have more options regarding testing locations that provide accommodations.

Our students receive instruction in test-taking strategies in preparation for taking this type of standardized test. For more specific information about the ISEE online at: <https://erblearn.org/parents/admission/isee>

LOCATIONS

When you visit the ISEE website, you can also access a list of locations that are administering the ISEE.

TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS

You must apply at least five weeks prior to the testing date to be eligible for testing accommodations. This requires completing a form and a letter from the school (in this case Sand Hill School). PLEASE NOTE that only select locations will provide accommodations, so make sure that you take that into consideration when you are reviewing the testing locations.

Also, many testing locations can become full, so it is important to register as early as possible.



SSAT (SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST)

The SSAT is a norm-referenced, standardized test that is required at many independent schools, including high schools. The SSAT measures the basic verbal, quantitative, and reading skills students develop over time. It is important to register early for this test, especially if you are requesting accommodations. You can find out more online at <http://www.ssat.org/>

What are some of the private school options in our area?

School	Grade levels	School size	Class size or Ratio	Student profile	SEL	Learning support
Bowman Int'l School Palo Alto	K-8	243	5:1	Self-directed learner	No evidence	No evidence
Carey San Mateo	PreK-5	250	10:1	Able to handle a more rigorous academic program	No evidence	Little
Compass High School	9-12	50	8:1	Bright students with learning differences	Strong	Strong
Fusion San Mateo	6-12	N/A	1:1	Individualized	No evidence	High
Gideon Hausner Palo Alto	K-8	305	Gr 1-5=12 Gr 6-8=20	Jewish	No evidence	Moderate
Girls Middle School Palo Alto	6-8	200	6:1	All girls; nonsectarian	Strong	No evidence
Helios School Sunnyvale	K-8	153	7:1	Gifted (qualitative assessment)	Some	None
Hillbrook Los Gatos	PK-8	383	7:1	Independent, motivated learners	Strong	Moderate evidence
Junipero Serra High School San Mateo	9-12	837	11:1	Catholic high school for boys	Some	Strong
Keys Palo Alto	K-8	315	7:1	Independent, motivated learners	Moderate	Moderate

School	Grade levels	School size	Class size or Ratio	Student profile	SEL	Learning support
Kirby Prep School Santa Cruz	6-12	239	12:1	College Prep	Moderate	Moderate
Los Altos Christian Los Altos	1-8	200	15:1	Christian character, positive leadership skills	Some	Strong
Lydian Academy Menlo Park	6-12		1:1	Individualized	No evidence	High
Menlo School in Atherton	6-12	MS 219 HS 576	18 11:1	Strong academic	Some	Moderate
Mid-Peninsula High School Menlo Park	9-12	135	8:1	College Prep, individualized, strengths-based	Strong	Strong
Mercy High School Burlingame	9-12	380	11:1	Catholic high school for girls	Some	Strong
Mulberry School Los Gatos	PK-8	162	13:1	Independent, motivated learners	Moderate	No evidence
Nativity Menlo Park	K-8	301	23:1	Traditional, high academic	Moderate	Moderate
Odyssey San Mateo	6-8	48	5:1	Academically gifted	No evidence	None
Palo Alto Prep	9-12	65	6:1	College prep, individualized, strengths-based	Strong	Strong
Phillips Brooks Menlo Park	Preschool 5	292	8:1	Independent, motivated learners	Strong	Moderate
Pinewood Los Altos	K-12	595	7:1	Academically rigorous	No evidence	Some
Redeemer Lutheran School RWC	K-8	208	19:1	Academic focus	No evidence	Little
Sacred Heart Schools Atherton	Preschool 12	1,167	7:1	Independent learners, academic rigor	No evidence	Moderate



School	Grade levels	School size	Class size or Ratio	Student profile	SEL	Learning support
St. Ignatius	9-12	1,500	12:1	Co-ed Catholic high school	Some	Moderate
St. Matthews Episcopal San Mateo	Preschool - 8	394	6:1	Confident, strong academic	Strong	Some
Sea Crest Half Moon Bay	K-8	300	10:1	Constructivist, individualized	Strong	No evidence
Serendipity School Belmont	K-5	223	14:1	Differentiated instruction		
Sierra Santa Clara	K-12	87	9:1	Academic focus, but individualized to student's needs	No evidence	Moderate
Sterne School SF	5-12	144	7:1	Strengths-based; students with learning differences	No evidence	Strong
Synergy School	PK-8	192	1st – 3rd Grades 13:1 4th – 5th Grades 21:1 6th – 8th Grades 25:1 Specialist classes 13:1 to 25:1	Hands-on, progressive	High	Little
Trinity Menlo Park	JK-5		16:1	Academic rigor, self-discovery	Some	No evidence
Ventana Los Altos	Preschool 5	152	5:1	Creative, inquisitive, self-directed learners	Strong	No evidence
Wilkinson HMB	JK-8	61	15:1	Academic focus with individualization	Some	Little
Woodland Portola Valley	PK-8	262	7:1	Independent learners; emphasis on academics and character development	Some	None

School	Grade levels	School size	Class size or Ratio	Student profile	SEL	Learning support
Woodside Priory Woodside	6-12	375	5:1	Avg to abv avg; hard workers; rigorous academics	Some	Moderate
Wornick Foster City	K-8	178	5:1	Critical thinkers, problem solvers, STEM emphasis	Some	Little



What about transitioning to a public school?

Even though you may prefer placement in a private school, openings are not always available. Public schools are always a backup option. If you decide to pursue placement in public school, your student may benefit from having an Individual Education Plan (IEP). If it is determined that your student is ineligible for an IEP; a 504 Plan is a good option. Please see Appendix, page 30, for *5 Things to Know About a 504 Plan for K-12 Students*.

Setting up an IEP

- If your student does not have an IEP, then you must first indicate that you intend to enroll your student in the district for the following year and that they are currently attending a specialized school.
- You then can request that your student be assessed for special education and you want to do so in writing so the district is compelled to respond to you in 15 days.
- Please see the Sample Letter for Requesting Evaluation in Public School, Appendix.
- We recommend sending that letter certified to the director of Special Education in your home district. (Determine the name of the Special Education Director first and send the letter directly to that person.)
- Since your student is currently attending Sand Hill School, the legal process mandates that the district in which your student currently attends school (this is called your Local Education Agency-LEA) must do the testing. They will administer the testing and send their recommendations to your home school district. However, your home school district is not required to accept their recommendations. Sometimes, your home school district may insist on doing their own testing and develop their own recommendations once they have received the testing and recommendations from the LEA.
- Please note that a psycho-educational report done by a private clinician including an evaluation done at CHC does not automatically qualify your student for special education. It may be influential in the district's decision of determining eligibility but it does not mean your student will receive special education services.
- Please see Appendix for NCLD's [What is an IEP?](#)
- Please see Appendix for [Top 10 Things to Know About IEPs](#) from NCLD.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who do I talk with at Sand Hill regarding transition?

Please contact the Sand Hill School Director and/or the Transition Coordinator for more detailed information about transition.

Does my student need an IEP?

This decision would be on a case by case basis but many if not most of the Sand Hill students would benefit from having an IEP if the choice is to attend a public school.

Should I consider a public school option?

We recommend that you make initial contact with your district even if you want your student to attend a private school.

What support do you provide for transition?

Transition support includes:

- Counseling with Sand Hill staff to determine transition readiness
- Sand Hill School Transition Guidebook
- Filling out school mandated paperwork

If you would like to update your student's evaluation, you can arrange for this through clinical services at Children's Health Council.

What do you provide to the transition school?

We provide one copy of each of the following to each school:

- Current AIMSWeb benchmark data regarding reading and math
- Personalized Plan or Report Card
- Letters of Recommendation / Recommendation Forms

What is the ISEE? And SSAT?

Most private schools require a test called the Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE). Some private schools require that students complete this test as part of the admissions process for grades 5 and above. Other private schools require the ISEE below grade 5. It is important to know what the private school to which you are applying requires. *It is important to register early for this test (summer) so that you have a choice of testing locations that provide accommodations.*

The SSAT is a norm-referenced, standardized test that is required at many independent schools. The SSAT measures the basic verbal, quantitative, and reading skills students develop over time. It is important to register early for this test, especially if you are requesting accommodations. You can find out more online at www.ssat.org.

Should my student receive special tutoring to prepare for these tests?

This is your choice. At Sand Hill, we only will provide test-taking strategies for taking standardized tests. We recommend that if you would like your student to have specific instruction regarding the ISEE, SSAT or HSPT that you arrange for this type of tutoring outside of Sand Hill.

What special supports will be provided during the transition/application process?

We will provide specific instruction in building Executive Function and social-emotional skills that are required for self-managing in a less personalized and supportive setting. We will also provide coaching to prepare your student for the shadow/interview process that is usually part of the admissions process at a private school.

What is the typical tenure of a student at Sand Hill before transition?

The number of years a typical student spends at Sand Hill depends upon their personal challenges, their responsiveness to our program and the availability of traditional classrooms that meet their needs.

What resources are available to me?

Clinical Services at CHC can provide the following services:

- Parent Consultations
- Interdisciplinary Evaluation
- Executive Functioning coaching beginning April 2020

Community and online resources include:

- National Center for Learning Disabilities (nclld.org)
- PickyParent.com
- Great Schools (greatschools.org)
- International Dyslexia Association (IDA — dyslexiaida.org)
- Understood.org



APPENDIX



Sand Hill School Transition Questionnaire

To be completed by parents.

Student Name

Date

Your Name

Town

What 5 words or phrases would you choose to describe your student?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What are your hopes for your child?

As you consider a school for your student, what non-academic offerings are important? Are there particular interests or considerations? *(i.e. wants football, interested in drama or outdoor activities, be close to home, etc.)*



What type of school are you interested in for your student? *(Check all that apply)*

Public

Private Day

Boarding

Parochial/Religious

No preference/ don't know yet

Are there any specific schools that you are thinking about?

What are your student's general interests or passions? *(loves jazz music, strategic computer games, mountain biking, skiing, etc.)*

What extracurricular activities is your student involved in outside of school? *(clubs, art classes, lessons, scouts, music, etc.)*

Please describe your planned summer activities: *(camps, travel, etc.)*

Please describe any volunteer or work/community experience in which your student has been involved. *(babysitting, pet sitting, community drive, church involvement, etc.)*

Visiting a School Worksheet: What to Ask, What to Look For

School visits provide crucial information that will assist you in your choice. Before a visit, do some planning. During your visit, use this worksheet to record answers to your key questions.

Name of school	Recommended by
Address	Phone
Email	Website
Contact person (principal, etc.)	Contact person's phone
Contact person's email	
Type of School	
Private school Traditional public school Public charter school	
Total number of students enrolled	
Evidence of student diversity	
Average student-teacher ratio	Class size

QUESTIONS TO ASK

What is the school's **philosophy** regarding instruction and how students learn?

How do you **individualize instruction**?

What type of **support** does your school have for kids with learning differences? (Is there a learning specialist on staff?)

What is your policy on **homework**?

How do you evaluate **student progress**? How frequently will you report my student's progress?

Are teachers able to provide **accommodations** for students?

What **special programs** does the school have? (sports, visual arts, performing arts, other)

What is the **daily schedule** for my student's grade level?

What is the **school calendar**?

What are your resources/programs/volunteer opportunities for **parents**?

Is there an active **PTA group**?

What is your **policy on discipline and safety**?



How do teachers use **technology** to engage students in the classroom? To communicate with students? To communicate with parents?

How will **teachers collaborate** to meet my student's learning needs? How do you support professional development?

Do you have LD specialists on your staff? How knowledgeable are classroom teachers about LD?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Cheerful, inviting classrooms

Displays of student work

Confident, involved principal

Enthusiastic, knowledgeable teachers who keep students engaged and connect with them

Positive behavior in halls, lunchroom, on playground

Good condition of building, facilities, grounds

ESPECIALLY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS OR ONLINE SCHOOLS

Is Financial Aid available?

What is the tuition? Are there payment schedules?

Are there additional fees (for extracurricular activities, tutoring, field trips)?

Is the school accredited? By which organization(s)?

NOTES/GENERAL IMPRESSIONS





Sample Letter for Requesting Evaluation in Public School

Your Name
Your Street Address
Your City and State
Your Phone Number

Date

Principal's Name
School Name
School Address

Reference: Student's Name
DOB: Student's date of birth
School: Name of School and enrolled grade

Dear XXX:

Our student is currently enrolled at Sand Hill School in Palo Alto, CA. Sand Hill School serves students with learning and attention challenges. We are planning to transition our student back to [name of your local school] in the fall of 2025.

We are requesting a comprehensive assessment for special education services for our student to be followed by an IEP meeting. We look forward to receiving the evaluation plan explaining the tests that will be administered. Once we have approved the evaluation, we look forward to scheduling the IEP meeting.

I would also appreciate any other information you have regarding the evaluation, how eligibility is determined, and the general Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.

If you need more information, please call me at home (your home phone) or at work (your work phone).

Thank you very much for your kind assistance. I look forward to your prompt reply. Sincerely,

Your name
Your contact information



What is an IEP?

By the NCLD Editorial Team

Each public school student who receives special education and related services must have an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**. Each IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly individualized document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for students with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each student with a disability.

To create an effective IEP, parents, teachers, other school staff and often the student must come together to look closely at the student's unique needs. These individuals pool knowledge, experience and commitment to design an educational program that will help the student be involved in, and progress in, the general curriculum. The IEP guides the delivery of special education supports and services for the student with a disability.

General Steps In the Special Education Process

- Student is identified as possibly needing special education and related services.
- Student is evaluated.
- Eligibility is decided.
- Student is found eligible for services.
- IEP meeting is scheduled.
- IEP meeting is held and the IEP is written.
- Services are provided.
- Progress is measured and reported to parents.
- IEP is reviewed.
- Student is reevaluated.

Contents of the IEP

By law, the IEP must include certain information about the student and the educational program designed to meet his or her unique needs. This information covers topics such as current performance, annual goals, special education, and related services, accommodations, participation in state and district-wide tests, needed transition services and measured progress.

The IEP Team Members

The team that writes a student's Individualized Education Program includes the parent(s), regular education teacher(s), special education teacher(s), other individuals from the school and district and the student when appropriate.

A meeting to write the IEP must be held within 30 calendar days of deciding that the student is eligible for special education and related services. Each team member brings important information to the IEP meeting. Members share their information and work together to write the student's Individualized Education Program. Each person's information adds to the team's understanding of the student and what services the student needs.

Writing the IEP

To help decide what special education and related services the student needs, generally the IEP team will begin by looking at the student's evaluation results such as classroom tests, individual tests are given to establish the student's eligibility, and observations by teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, related service providers, administrators, and others. This information will help the team describe the student's "present level of educational performance"—in other words, how the student is currently doing in school. Knowing how the student is currently performing in school will help the team develop annual goals to address those areas where the student has an identified educational need.

The IEP Team Must Also Discuss Specific Information About the Student. This Includes

- The student's strengths;
- The parents' ideas for enhancing their student's education;
- The results of recent evaluations or reevaluations; and
- How the student has done on state and district-wide tests.

Depending on the needs of the student, the IEP team also needs to consider special factors, which include behavioral issues, limited proficiency in English, blindness or visual impairment, communication needs, deafness or difficulty hearing, and assistive technology.

The Discussion of What the Student Needs Be Framed Around How to Help the Student

- advance toward the annual goals;
- be involved in and progress in the general curriculum;
- participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities; and
- be educated with and participate with other students with disabilities and non-disabled students.

Based on the above discussion, the IEP team will then write the student’s IEP. This includes the services and supports the school will provide for the student. If the IEP team decides that a student needs a particular device or service (including an intervention, accommodation, or other program modification), the IEP team must write this information in the IEP.

After the IEP Is Written

When the IEP has been written, parents must receive a copy at no cost to themselves. Everyone who will be involved in implementing the IEP must have access to the document. This includes the student’s:

- regular education teacher(s);
- special education teacher(s);
- related service provider(s) (for example, speech therapist); or
- any other service provider (such as a paraprofessional) who will be responsible for a part of the student’s education.

Each of these individuals needs to know what his or her specific responsibilities for carrying out the student’s IEP. This includes the specific accommodations, modifications and supports that the student must receive, according to the IEP.

Parents Permission

Before the school can provide a student with special education and related services for the first time, the student’s parents must give their written permission.

Top 10 Things to Know About IEPs

By the NCLD Editorial Team

If your student is struggling in school because of a learning disability (LD), an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) might be an option to support his or her K–12 educational needs. Every public school student who receives special education and related services must have an IEP, and it’s hard to understate just how important this document is—it’s the cornerstone of a quality education for many students with disabilities. As a parent, you play a key role at all points in the IEP process, and your knowledge and advocacy can make a big difference in ensuring your student’s success. As you browse NCLD’s IEP

Headquarters and learn more about IEPs, here are ten points to be sure you take away:

- **Getting an IEP is one step in the special education process.** In order to get an IEP, a student must be evaluated and found eligible for special education services. An IEP does not automatically follow a LD diagnosis, and not all students with LD will be eligible for an IEP. (If your student is not eligible for an IEP, a 504 plan may be available for in-school support.)
- **The IEP should contain individualized information about your student and lay out the educational program designed to meet his or her needs.** By law, the IEP must include certain information about the student and the services and supports the school will provide. This information covers topics such as current performance, annual goals, special education and related services, accommodations, participation in state and district-wide tests, needed transition services and measured progress. Remember that there is no “standard IEP”—every student has different needs and should receive a different plan. You can use NCLD’s IEP Checklist to make sure your student’s IEP includes all necessary components.
- **IEPs are backed by the law.** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the key federal education law that serves students with LD, requires that every student eligible for special education services has an IEP and sets requirements for the development, review and revision of the plan. IDEA grants specific rights to parents and students that you should become familiar with.
- **Parents play a crucial role at all points in the IEP process.** As a parent, you are an important member of your student’s IEP team. You have the right to participate in all IEP meetings and have input in all educational decisions made for your student. You also have the right to bring anyone with you to the IEP meeting that you may find helpful in the discussion. From the initial evaluation to when your student graduates, your active participation will help ensure your student’s IEP is crafted and implemented in a way that will lead to his or her success. Make sure you fully read and understand your student’s IEP.
- **IEPs should be results-oriented and time-sensitive.** Your student’s IEP should state measurable annual goals. Reports should include objective measures — like results gathered by curriculum-based measurement and standardized tests. (Teacher-given grades and reports are important to consider, but should not be the only measure of progress.) If you’re concerned that your student is not making progress, don’t hesitate to reach out.
- **Follow-up is key in ensuring proper implementation of the IEP.** Parents often assume that their student’s teachers will know what’s in their student’s IEP — unfortunately, this is not always the case. It’s important to make an effort to meet with your student’s teachers (including those who teach special classes like music, art and physical education) and other service providers. There’s always a chance that something in the IEP will be overlooked or forgotten, so be sure to monitor your student’s schoolwork, performance on tests and attitude toward school. Check in with your student and his or her teachers to make sure that all services and accommodations are being carried out as stated in the IEP.
- **IEPs must be updated and reviewed at least annually.** IDEA requires that the school team (including parents) meet at least yearly to review the IEP and make changes for the upcoming year. As your student’s challenges, achievements and needs evolve, his or her IEP should change

to reflect this. While any change to the IEP must be approved by the parents and school, parents can request the team meet at any time (be sure to make this request in writing). In other words, if you're concerned about your student's progress and think his or her IEP might need to change, you don't need to wait until your annual review to discuss the situation.

- **The IEP should include plans for life after high school — long before it's time to graduate.** IDEA requires that transition services (plans and measurable goals related to post-secondary training, education, employment, and independent living) be included in a student's IEP starting at the age of 16. But it's often wise to start thinking about transition earlier and many states start this process at age 14. Students with LD need to start transition planning in middle school because they may need to take specific classes or courses of study to keep them on a path to achieve their postsecondary goals.
- **Remember that IEPs do not extend to college, post-secondary programs, or the workplace.** The IEP ends at the conclusion of high school, or if the student is going to continue to receive special education services or supports, at the age of 22 (in most states). IDEA services do not continue into a two- or four-year college or the workplace, and needed accommodations will not be granted automatically. Use NCLD's Checklist for Transitioning from High School to College to understand how to prepare for the transition out of high school.
- **If there is a dispute over an IEP, you have options.** First, learn more about your student's rights under IDEA and check out NCLD's IEP Meeting Conversation Stoppers to learn ways to respectfully but forcefully advocate for your student's rights in some common situations. If you continue to disagree with the school district's assessment or educational program for your student or believe that the school has violated any IDEA requirements, IDEA provides dispute resolution options that may be an option for your family. You can always contact your local Parent Training & Information Center or state education department for more information.

5 Things to Know About a 504 Plan for K-12 Students

By the NCLD Editorial Team

If your student is struggling in school due to a learning disability, a 504 plan may be a good option for supporting your student's K-12 educational needs. Before you decide whether to pursue a 504 plan for your student, you'll need to learn about the similarities and differences between 504 plans and IEPs. You'll also need to ask yourself, "Is a 504 Plan Right for My Student?" As you learn more about 504 plans, here are five key points to keep in mind:

- **The 504 plan protects students who have a disability that substantially limits one or more**



major life activity. While the law (i.e., Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) does not specifically mention learning disabilities, however, “major life activities” can include learning, reading, thinking, writing and concentrating. Section 504 has much broader definitions of disability and so it pertains to many more people. Do not assume that your student is not eligible for protection if he or she doesn’t meet the criteria for services under IDEA.

- **The 504 plan outlines educational services to be provided to the student.** The 504 plan should specifically lay out all of the accommodations and educational services that will be provided to your student. This is the case regardless of whether your student is in general education classes or receives special education instruction. It should be reviewed at least annually so it outlines what your student needs for the upcoming school year.
- **There is no standard 504 plan — every student has different needs and should receive a different plan.** Every student is entitled to receive accommodations and special education services that best fit their needs. This can include: computer/other technology, extended time or privacy for test taking, verbal or non-verbal cues, note-takers or other help. Do not let the school provide your student with a “vanilla package,” a set of accommodations the school says it gives to all students with a learning disability.
- **A 504 plan may be a good option for your student, if your student is ineligible for services under IDEA.** The IDEA law requires that your student must meet two prongs of the law in order to be served by special education: 1) The student must have one (or more) of the 13 disabilities listed in IDEA which includes learning disabilities and attention disorders; and, 2) as a result of the disability, the student needs special education to make progress in school in order to benefit from the general education program. This legal requirement essentially says that some kids with LD or attention disorders may not meet the state or district requirements of the second prong. These students, however, because they have an LD or ADHD, may meet the requirement to have a 504 plan if their disability “substantially limits them in performing one or more major life activity.”

A 504 plan is a good way to formalize accommodations if your student is already receiving them on an informal basis. Sometimes teachers will provide informal or “undocumented” accommodations, support or services to students as a way to shore up their daily learning. While their efforts may be genuine and may also be helpful to the student in the short-term, it is inappropriate for such informal accommodations to be provided for any length of time, especially if the teacher or school suspects the student has a learning disability or attention disorder. You have the right to request an evaluation (in writing) and/or to discuss whether your student is eligible for services under IDEA and/or Section 504.