



**Northern Suburban Special Education District (NSSED)**  
*Frequently Asked Questions – A Parent Resource*

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**1. What is NSSED?**

NSSED is a cooperative of eighteen local school districts in the north suburban area of Chicago that have joined together to provide special education services for children in those districts. The member school districts include:

- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Northbrook School District 27      | Lake Bluff School District 65        |
| Northbrook School District 28      | Lake Forest School District 67       |
| Sunset Ridge School District 29    | Bannockburn School District 106      |
| Northbrook/Glenview District 30    | Deerfield School District 109        |
| West Northfield School District 31 | North Shore School District 112      |
| Glenview School District 34        | Township High School District 113    |
| Glencoe School District 35         | Lake Forest High School District 115 |
| Winnetka School District 36        | New Trier High School District 203   |
| Kenilworth School District 38      | Glenbrook High School District 225   |

The cooperative was formed to pool educational and professional resources in order to provide specialized quality programs and services that would be beyond the ability of an individual district to provide on its own.

NSSED strives to promote positive educational outcomes for *all* students. The district does this through: 1) instructional programs, 2) support services, 3) professional development, and 4) leadership in best practices for students with disabilities.

## **2. What types of instructional programs does NSSED provide?**

NSSED provides a variety of instructional programs from birth through age twenty-one. Programs generally serve students whose academic, social and/or life skills needs cannot be appropriately met in a general education classroom in their home school even with supplemental aids and services. Initial placement in an NSSED instructional program is a decision made by parents, the school team and NSSED staff at the IEP meeting. While most of the classrooms for the instructional programs are located within member district schools, they are taught and supervised by NSSED staff. Programs are designed to include opportunities for inclusion and to keep children as close as possible to their home school. For a complete list of instructional programs, visit the NSSED website at [www.nssed.org](http://www.nssed.org).

### **2a. How do I find out if an NSSED program is appropriate for my child?**

If you think your child might benefit from being in an NSSED program contact your local district special education administrator. This position has different names in different districts including Special Education Supervisor, Pupil Service Administrator, and Student Support Service Administrator or Coordinator.

If an NSSED program or service is being considered as part of your child's IEP, ask to visit the different programs/classrooms that might be appropriate. Karen Noonan, Director of Programs and Support Services at NSSED is also available to answer questions and provide more information. She can be reached at (847) 831-5100, extension 210.

### **2b. Does an NSSED classroom have to be in my home school in order for my child to attend?**

No. Your child would be placed in the program that best meets his/her unique needs. Every effort is made to keep students in his/her home school or as close to their home school as possible.

### **2c. Are there instructional programs other than NSSED's available outside of my home school?**

Yes. Some districts in the co-op have initiated their own special education classrooms to specifically meet the needs of their students. On a very limited basis, some sponsoring districts may allow students from outside the district to attend these classrooms. Information on district-based instructional programs can be obtained through your local district special education administrator.

### **3. What types of support services are available through NSSED?**

NSSED provides its member districts with a wide range of developmental, therapeutic and other support services necessary to help a child with a disability benefit from special education. These services are designed to augment, enhance or support local district resources. Member districts can contract for these services on an on-going, yearlong basis such as for occupational therapy or adaptive PE. Usually, an NSSED therapist in that specialty is assigned to that building for that school year to provide services to eligible children.

However, many NSSED services are contracted on a short-term, as-needed basis. For example, a school may need assistance with behavior intervention strategies for a particular student or seek guidance on usage of assistive technology. In such cases, NSSED would be a consultant to the district to address a specific issue and/or child.

For a complete list of NSSED support services, visit the NSSED website at [www.nssed.org](http://www.nssed.org).

#### **3a. Are these types of services only available to my child through NSSED?**

No. Member districts, especially larger ones, often provide selected support services on their own. Many local schools find it more advantageous to employ their own speech and language pathologists, for example, given the large number of students who qualify for speech therapy.

#### **3b. How do I know if a service my child is receiving is from NSSED or my district?**

Because the relationship between NSSED and every school district is unique, the only way to be sure is to ask. Your local district special education administrator will be able to tell you who provides what service in your district/school.

#### **3c. How do I request support services for my child?**

Contact your local district special education administrator and request an IEP meeting. Be prepared to discuss specific reasons why your child would benefit educationally from the desired support service. Karen Noonan, Director of Programs and Support Services at NSSED is also available to answer questions or provide more information. She can be reached at (847) 831-5100, extension 210.

#### **3d. Who makes the decision whether my child is eligible for support services, the school team or NSSED?**

There should be a consensus among the school team, NSSED staff and parents. As with all differences of opinions, if you strongly disagree with the school or NSSED and cannot reach an acceptable agreement, you should pursue it further within your district hierarchy (e.g. special education administrator, assistant, superintendent, etc.) If there is no satisfactory resolution, you may want to consider your legal options, including mediation. For a detailed explanation of your legal rights, see the Illinois State Board of Education document, *A Parent's Rights*, available online at [http://www.isbe.net/SPEC-ED/html/parent\\_rights.htm](http://www.isbe.net/SPEC-ED/html/parent_rights.htm).

#### **4. What types of professional development / leadership in best practices does NSSED provide?**

NSSED provides a variety of workshops, seminars and training sessions for both NSSED and local district staff. The workshops cover academic, social and emotional topics to ensure that educators are able to teach students with a wide variety of abilities and needs. Some of the past topic areas include effective visual strategies for students, learning strategies from the University of Kansas, positive behavior interventions and how to make instructional decisions based on student data. NSSED also provides leadership in best practices and legislative advocacy at the local and state levels.

##### **4a. Are parents allowed to attend NSSED professional development programs?**

Absolutely. Parents are always welcome to attend any of the workshops.

##### **4b. How do I find out about the program?**

The NSSED website, [www.nssed.org](http://www.nssed.org), has a professional development section with monthly calendars detailing the programs. Your special education administrator and principals also have current workshop information. Marilee Ciello, Director of Professional Development and District Services, (847) 831-5100, extension 248 can provide more information and answer any questions.

##### **4c. What are some of the current initiatives that I should know about?**

NSSED employs many different general and special education initiatives to promote positive outcomes in all students and increase the capacity of its member districts to meet the needs of their students. In addition to NSSED initiatives, there are other programs and services, many of which NSSED consult upon, that are offered by the districts. Some of these programs and services are the same in almost every NSSED district, some are similar from district to district, and others are unique to a particular district. As parents, it is helpful to know what initiatives are offered in your area. Contact your special education administrator to find out if these initiatives are offered in your child's school.

The following list does not purport to be complete but is an overview of some of NSSED's educational initiatives:

**Flexible Service Delivery System (FLEX)/Response to Intervention** - A *general education* initiative that allows schools to meet the needs of all students through maximized use of all available resources. This system promotes the use of a systematic data-driven process to identify and analyze concerns, develop and implement *intervention* plans, and evaluate intervention effectiveness. Both Flexible Service Delivery and Response to Intervention allow schools to meet the needs of *all* students in a responsible way by calling on the expertise of all general and special education staff, collaborating actively and meaningfully with parents, and providing support to ongoing student progress.

**Disability Awareness Program** - Programs and activities that educate students about various disabilities and encourage an understanding about how children with disabilities are just children. The Kids on the Block Disability Awareness Program teaches elementary age students through dialogue with puppets and follow-up discussions. Other programs are Celebration of Differences, Chex-Mix classroom activity, and Beyond Definition, a high school play.

**Autism Team Services** - NSSED provides leadership, training, on-site coaching support, and resource sharing to help districts build their capacity to meet the needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other non-verbal learning disabilities. Desired outcomes from NSSED Autism Team Services may include a) meaningful and effective inclusion of students with ASD, b) appropriate assessment and accurate identification of students with ASD, c) collaborative relationships with parents and private providers, and d) staff who are knowledgeable of positive behavior support strategies, augmentative communication systems, and the environmental and sensory needs of students with ASD.

**Parent Mentor Program** - The purpose of the Parent Mentor Program is to provide educational opportunities for parents and staff to learn effective communication skills as they work together to design and deliver programs for children with special needs. The program's intent is to build collaborative partnerships between parents, educators and administrators. An underlying principle of the program is to build trust between school staff and parents that will result in a non-adversarial approach to problem solving. The Parent Mentor will provide parents and staff with training, networking opportunities, and resource information on the educational process or a specific disability. Parent Mentor services may also take the form of assisting individual parents with the various parts of their IEP process. Overall the Parent Mentor seeks to facilitate access to information and provide an opportunity to rethink or reframe an existing process or problem.

## **5. Other Information**

### **5a. Is my school charged for using NSSED services?**

As part of its membership in the co-op, every school/district receives staff development and technical assistance through the school year. However, depending upon the type and duration of a service required for an individual student, a district might incur incremental costs.

Districts are legally required to base all decisions on whether to provide services exclusive upon the needs of the child as identified in the IEP and cannot deny a request solely on the basis of costs.

### **5b. How is NSSED funded?**

Tuitions and membership fees paid by the member districts (e.g. local school tax dollars) account for the largest portion of NSSED income followed by federal grants and state monies.