



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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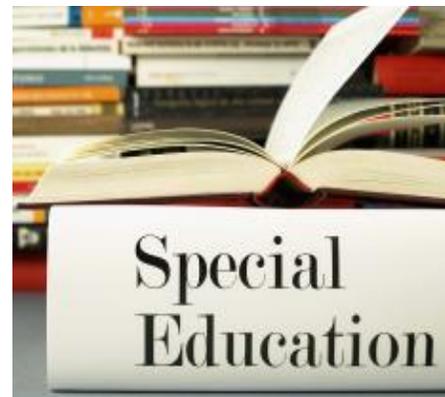
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## A Chance to Improve Special Education Services in the District

By Soumya Bhat

Yesterday, the Council advanced a set of bills focused on strengthening DC's special education services. These proposals have broad community support and will raise the District's standards to better serve students with special needs. DCFPI urges the Council to pass these bills when they are up for a vote on October 7th. Here are two policy changes from the legislative package that we think are especially important.

**Expanding services to more young children with developmental delays.** Currently, infants and toddlers up to age three can get services if they have a 50 percent developmental delay in one area or a 25 percent in two areas. The legislation being considered by the Council would allow children to get services earlier, as soon as they demonstrate a developmental delay of 25 percent in just one area.



Early identification of disabilities in children can lead to better academic and behavioral outcomes and also lessen future costs to the city and society. The earlier that a child is evaluated and a disability or developmental delay is identified, the sooner they are able to receive the services they require. Low-income children may have the most to gain from early identification. Children living at or below the poverty line are [more than twice as likely](#) to be at high risk for developmental delays (19 percent) as their peers living at more than twice the poverty line (7 percent).

**Getting school-age students the help they need faster.** Right now, DC Public Schools and DC public charter schools must assess or evaluate a student for special education eligibility within 120 days of a referral. The legislation proposes to change this timeline to 60 days from the student's referral date. Keeping a child and their family waiting for half a school year for this process is a waste of learning time for the student and an unwise use of public education resources. While children wait to be evaluated, they go without the services they need, often falling farther behind their peers.

DCFPI looks forward to watching these bills pass through the Council this fall.