

The Evaluation Process

Early Intervention is Key

Early intervention is the keys to helping children make up ground if they appear to be lagging behind. Parents and or school personnel (if school age) can refer the child to the local Educational Support Team if the child doesn't seem to be progressing as expected or as typical age/grade peers.

The team which will consist of parents/guardians, teachers, guidance, the Principal in some cases, 504 case manager, special educator and other invited participants that may have specific knowledge of the student and particular concern, (i.e. speech pathologist or behavioral consultant), and also any other person that the parent wants to invite as their guest.

If through the problem solving team(PST) the early interventions and suggested strategies don't appear to make a difference after a period of time for your child, then the team or the parent can make a referral to the principal or assistant principal for an evaluation of a suspected disability.

Referral for Special Education Evaluation

Once a referral is made the school will respond by setting up an Evaluation and Planning Team (EPT, (many of the same people from the earlier PST may also be on this team). The EPT must consist of the parent/guardian, the child's regular education teacher, a special educator, LEA (Local Education Agency), any other relevant faculty and/or invited guest of parent.

What is the Evaluation Going to Tell Us

The evaluation is designed to ask and answer the following questions:

- Does your child have a disability?
- Does your child's disability have a negative (adverse) effect on his/her learning?
- Does your child need specialized instruction in order to learn?

Preschool special education is called Early Essential Education (EEE) and has unique requirements. Only the first and third bulleted questions need to be asked and answered for preschool special education evaluations, as an adverse effect does not have to be documented.

To qualify for preschool special education, a child between the ages of 3 through 5 must have:

- A developmental delay or a diagnosed medical condition, which will result in a significant delay by the time the child turns 5.
- Show at least a 40% in one or more of the following skill areas; Communication, adaptive behavior such as social or self care skills, gross or fine motor skills or thinking, such as perception, memory, processing or reasoning.

Prior to an Evaluation

Before your child's evaluation takes place the school must provide and review with you your parental rights in special education and they must obtain your written permission for an initial evaluation in special education. This written permission indicates that you have given consent to the testing measures that will be used to evaluate your child. Meetings related to this process should be scheduled at a time convenient to the team members. You will receive a notice before the meeting with the scheduled time, location, and who is scheduled to attend the meeting. In conducting or arranging the evaluation the following requirements will be met:

- The evaluation will be conducted by individuals who are trained and knowledgeable.
- The evaluation includes all areas related to your child's suspected disability and include more than one measure
- If the team suspects your child has a learning disability, an evaluator must also

- observe your child
- The evaluation is conducted in your child's native language, unless it is not possible to do so.

The Evaluation Plan is Finalized

The team has met to discuss the questions they are seeking answers to; the school psychologist facilitates the process and will finalize the evaluation plan in terms of adding any additional questions that might have been requested by the team. The school psychologist will then forward the evaluation plan to all relevant evaluators for carrying out the plan. The School Psychologists complete the necessary cognitive and social/emotional/behavioral, achievement testing and any observations that are required. Parental input is key.

When will my child be tested?

After the evaluation plan is finalized the school district has 60 calendar days after parental consent is received to meet with the child, the parents, and other team members to gather the required information. All testing will be completed within the 60 day period. Parents will be notified prior to the day their child is tested so the parent and child know when the testing will take place.

What does this testing consist of?

The answer to this varies on a case by case basis depending on the child's achievement of basic milestones. Examples of this could range from simple surveys, face to face interviews, reviews of student records, structured standard testing to outside medical evaluations. These measures are completed by parents and a variety of professionals. A full listing of these individuals could entail but is not limited to the individuals that will appear in the next question.

Who tests my child?

The evaluation will be conducted by individuals who are trained and knowledgeable in areas related to your child's suspected disability and includes more than one measure. The list may consist of the following individuals but is not a comprehensive list:

School Psychologist
Speech and Language Pathologist
Occupational Therapist
Physical Therapist
Special Educator
Classroom Teacher

What do I do with the Evaluation Plan document?

Review it and if you have any questions call the school psychologist who is listed on the front page of the document at your child's school.

What happens after the testing takes place?

The team comes back together to see and hear the results of the evaluations, (evaluations are meant to be conducted within 60 calendar days, which begins on the day parental consent was received). After reviewing the results, the team makes a determination if the child has a disability, adverse effect and whether or not they are in need of special education. You as a parent will have a role in this decision-making based on the results of the evaluation. If the team doesn't agree, the LEA or (Local Education Agency representative) makes the final decision.

What do I do with the Draft Evaluation and Eligibility Report?

You will receive a draft evaluation and eligibility report from the school psychologist. You want to read the report and look for information you may not understand or have questions about. Mark the information you don't understand or anything you have a question about by highlighting, circling, etc. Bring this report to the meeting with your questions. Do not be intimidated by asking any questions.

What do I do with the Final Evaluation and Eligibility Report?

It is helpful if you have a notebook, folder, etc to store all of your school documents in so you can refer to them at a later time when the need arises.

What if I disagree with the evaluation results?

If you disagree with the evaluation results you can meet with the team to have them address your concerns or request an independent evaluation.

What do I do if my child is not found eligible?

If your child is not found to have a disability or to meet all three gates of special education, (disability, adverse effect, need for specialized instruction), then he/she will be referred back to a Section 504 team to determine if your child is eligible for a Section 504 Plan. If you as a parent disagree with the school's evaluation, you have the right to request an independent evaluation of your child at no cost to you. The process of obtaining an independent evaluation is explained in detail in the Parental Rights given to you and will be explained to you again should you decide to pursue such an evaluation.

What will happen if my child is found eligible?

If your child is found to have a disability the next step is to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for your child that takes into account, all the information that we have just gathered through the evaluation process. We have just learned your child's strengths and challenges as well as his/her learning style and a very specific plan will be developed to support your child and give your child specialized instruction.

What is a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)?

Developing the IEP

Once again you will be notified through a written notice of the need to come together (within 30 days of completion of the evaluation plan) to develop an Individualized Education Plan. This plan will articulate how we will help your child make progress in the educational environment based on all that we have learned about them through the evaluation process. The IEP will be built around your child's strengths and how he/she learns best. The intent of the IEP is to address the areas of weakness identified through the evaluation.

IEP Participants

The IEP team will also consist of you as parents/guardians, your child's regular education teacher, LEA, special educator and any related service providers that may be needed as well as others requested by parent and or school, the child if appropriate, and when the team is discussing transition service (for students 14 and older), other agency representatives from the community that would be knowledgeable about transitions from school to adult life as the planning for such should begin early on.

What Is an IEP?

The individualized education program (IEP) is a written plan for the special education of a student with a disability. It describes the special education and related services specifically designed to meet the unique educational needs of the student with a disability. It contains goals and objectives based on the student's present level of performance. It specifies educational placement and setting, and describes the related services and supports necessary to reach the goals and objectives. The IEP describes what your child needs to learn to access the general education curriculum. It lists the supports, services, and accommodations that your child will need in order to make progress in the least restrictive environment. Parents need to give initial consent for an IEP to begin. The IEP must be reviewed and rewritten at least once per year, but the IEP team can reconvene at any time to review and revise the document, should there be a concern on the part of any team member, including the parents.

The IEP: What It Is Not:

The IEP is not a daily lesson plan. It is a long-term plan and thus will not tell you everything that a teacher will do with your child. It won't take the place of the plans that teachers write for a day or a week. The IEP describes things that you and the school have agreed to do for your child, but it is not a guarantee that the interventions will work. If, however, you review the IEP and feel that the interventions are not being successful, you need to reconvene the IEP team to discuss. Express your concerns, and discuss

alternative strategies. Remember that an IEP team can be reconvened at any time. The IEP is a fluid document. As your child grows, learns and changes, the IEP will need to change. It must be reviewed at least once each year, but it may be changed as often as you and the school agree that it needs to be changed.