

Evaluation: What Does it Mean For Your Child?

What is an evaluation?

Evaluation is the process for determining whether a child has a disability and needs special education and related services. It's the first step in developing an educational program that will help the child learn. A full and individual initial evaluation must be done before the initial provision of any special education or related services to a child with a disability, and students must be considered for a reevaluation at least once every three years.

Evaluation involves gathering information from a variety of sources about a child's functioning and development in all areas of suspected disability, including information provided by the parent. The evaluation may look at cognitive, behavioral, physical, and developmental factors, as well as other areas. All this information is used to determine the child's educational needs.

Why have an evaluation?

A full and individual educational evaluation serves many important purposes:

1. **Identification.** It can identify children who have delays or learning problems and may need special education and related services as a result.
2. **Eligibility.** It can determine whether your child is a child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and qualifies for special education and related services.
3. **Planning an Individualized Education Program (IEP).** It provides information that can help you and the school develop an appropriate IEP for your child.
4. **Instructional strategies.** It can help determine what strategies may be most effective in helping your child learn.
5. **Measuring progress.** It establishes a baseline for measuring your child's educational progress. The evaluation process establishes a foundation for developing an appropriate educational program. Even if the evaluation results show that your child does not need special education and related services, the information may still be used to help your child in a regular education program.

What questions should I consider when evaluation is proposed?

1. What tests and other evaluation materials are being considered for my child? Why?
2. How will the information be used to plan my child's education?
3. Will the evaluator observe my child in the classroom and talk to my child's teachers?
4. Has the evaluator had experience testing children with problems similar to my child's?
5. Will my child's disability interfere with obtaining valid test scores in any area?
6. Will a translator or an interpreter be available if my child needs one? Testing must be done in a child's native language or sign language if needed.
7. Is my child similar to the group on which the test was developed? Is the person responsible for conducting the test familiar with my child's culture?
8. Will test scores be based on my child's grade or age? If my child was retained, how will that be considered in evaluating the test results?
9. What kind of information will I be asked to contribute to the evaluation?
10. What will be done to help my child feel comfortable during the testing session?

What measures are used to evaluate a child?

No single test may be used as the sole measure for determining whether a child has a disability or for determining an appropriate educational program for your child. Both formal and informal tests and other evaluation measures are important in determining the special education and related services your child needs.

The school must conduct a full and individual evaluation consistent with the IDEA that uses information from diverse sources, including formal and informal data. Tests are important, but evaluation also includes other types of information such as:

- medical information
- comparisons of the child's progress to typical expectations of child development
- observations of how the child functions in school, at home, or in the community
- interviews with parents and school staff

As a parent, you have a wealth of information about the development and needs of your child. When combined with the results of tests and other evaluation materials, this information can be used to make decisions about your child's appropriate educational program.

How are evaluation results used?

After your child's evaluation is complete, you'll meet with a group of qualified professionals to discuss the results and determine whether your child has a disability under IDEA. The school must provide you with a copy of the evaluation report and a written determination of eligibility.

If the team determines, based on the evaluation results, that your child is eligible for special education and related services, the next step is to develop an IEP to meet your child's needs.

The goals and objectives the IEP team develops relate directly to the strengths and needs that were identified through evaluation.

It's important for you to understand the results of your child's evaluation before beginning to develop an IEP. Parents should ask to have the evaluation results explained to them in plain language by a qualified professional.

You will want to request the evaluation summary report before meeting with other members of the IEP team to develop the IEP. Reviewing the results in a comfortable environment before developing the IEP can reduce stress for parents and provide time to consider whether the results fit their own observations and experiences with their child.

What if I disagree with the school's evaluation?

If you disagree with the results of an evaluation, you have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation (IEE) at public expense. An IEE is conducted by qualified examiners not employed by the school. The school district must provide parents with a list names of possible examiners and provide the evaluation at no cost to the parents. If the school district denies a request for an IEE at public expense, the district must initiate a due process hearing to show that its evaluation was appropriate.

When the school provides an IEE, the evaluation must be accomplished under the same criteria that the school district uses for its evaluations. The school must consider the results of the IEE when determining eligibility or developing your child's IEP. If the result of the hearing is that the agency's evaluation is appropriate, you still have the right to obtain an IEE at your own expense. If the IEE meets the school's criteria, those results, too, must be considered by the IEP team.