

The Referral Process for Special Education Students

If you are concerned about your child's progress in school and you think that the problems may be related to an emotional or learning disability, you may need to refer him/her for an evaluation for special services.

- First, **talk to your child's teacher** about your concerns. Also, **talk with others who know your child in other situations**; such as your child's doctor, religious education teacher or a scout leader. If anyone else has recognized some difficulties, ask that they write a note to document their observations. If they have not observed difficulties, talk with other parents of children the same age to determine if the behavior(s) you observe are simply typical for your child's age. Sometimes, other parents can give you ideas on handling situation that you are experiencing with your child.
- If you still feel there is a need for referral, **write a letter** to the school principal or the director of special education in your town. Include some of the observations about your child, but keep it brief. Also, ask **that the teacher make a referral** for special services if he/she has noted some difficulties.
- As you gather this information and make contact with the school district, be sure to **keep dated copies of all letters or notes** you send or receive. **Document** all telephone conversations you have. **Keep** all of the information together in a safe place.
- The school can also make a referral. The school **must consider alternate interventions in the regular classroom**, such as extra support to assist with disruptive behavior, **before referring for special services**. In some situations, a Child Study Team (CST) may meet to discuss appropriate interventions. The CST can meet without parents being present to discuss any concerns the teaching staff may have about a child. You should ask about the CST's findings. **Even though a school must consider regular classroom interventions, a parent still has a right to refer their child for further evaluation.**
- **A referral, a Planning and Placement Team (PPT), of which the parent is a vital and equal team member, must meet.** The purpose of this meeting is to determine if an evaluation for special education services is necessary. The school must notify parents of the PPT meeting, in writing, at least five (5) days in advance. A parent must consent, in writing, to having their child evaluated prior to any testing.
- **At the PPT, parents should participate in discussions regarding what kinds of evaluations may be needed and what tests will be administered.** Since the PPT should be looking at the whole child, it is extremely important that the parent's observations and concerns are included in the evaluation process. Parents bring valuable information



regarding their child's history to the team. Parents also have different opportunities to observe their child's performance, and behaviors, in situations outside of the classroom. All recommended testing, and results, should be explained to the parents – preferably by the person who administered the test(s).

- **Another PPT will be scheduled to review evaluation results and the “team” will determine if the child is eligible for special education services.** If the child is eligible for services, and the parents have agreed to continue, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed by the team. Parent's contributions continue to be important in the development of the educational goals for their children.
- **The school must obtain written parental consent, prior to the child's initial placement into special education services.** Parents should receive a full copy of the IEP within five (5) school days after the PPT meeting.

The entire process, from the initial referral to the implementation of the IEP for the child, must be completed within forty-five (45) school days. This forty five day period excludes the time parents need to make consent decisions. Where written parental consent is required, parents may revoke their consent at any time.

The following fact sheets are available upon request:

Sample letter when making a referral
Keeping records in the referral process

