

Special Education Evaluation

An assessment is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, a comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs. The initial evaluation of your child will serve to answer three questions:

1. Does my child have a disability?
2. Where is my child functioning educationally?
3. Does my child need special education services and related services?

If you are concerned and would like your child to be evaluated you may request an evaluation from your child's school system. The school system may also request that your child be evaluated. This tipsheet will explain the process of special education evaluations.

INITIAL EVALUATION

The initial evaluation will provide information to assist you and the evaluation team to determine where your child is educationally performing and what educational supports they need to reach their potential.

Evaluation will begin with a team planning meeting. That team will include you the parent, regular and special education teachers, an evaluator of the school system, a local education agency representative, your child if appropriate and others as necessary and appropriate. The evaluation team will meet and review any existing data including school performance data, areas of concern, behavioral reports, and other reports or testing you may have from others such as non-school personnel including pediatricians, therapists, or other professionals. The team will review all data and reports and consider concerns you as the parent has and determine if testing is necessary. If the team determines that special education testing is necessary then the team will determine what types of testing will need to be completed by school personnel. This testing may include evaluations or review in

the following areas and other areas as determined necessary by the team:

- Environmental, Cultural, Language, and Economic Differences Reviews will be used to determine if the child has any differences that would mask a student's true abilities and thereby affect their educational performance,
- Instructional interventions and strategies that have already been used in the classroom,
- Classroom, local, or state Assessments,
- Classroom observations,
- Health,
- Hearing and Vision screening,
- Social and Emotional status,
- Behavior,
- Intelligence,
- Academic achievement and performance,
- Communication,
- Motor abilities,
- Parental concerns, and
- Any other data the team feels necessary to review or obtain.

INFORMED CONSENT

The school will provide you with a copy of your special education rights. Prior to the team agreeing to evaluate your child, you as the parent must provide written informed consent after you have had the opportunity to understand the information about the skills, abilities, and knowledge to be evaluated and the tests and instruments to be used to test your child.

ADDITIONAL TESTING REQUIREMENTS

There are additional considerations in special education testing that must be considered. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and the Alabama Administrative Code (AAC) require that tests



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administered to your child to evaluate their need for special education and related services must:

- Be in your child's native language or communication mode,
- Be given by trained and knowledgeable personnel,
- Use more than one measure or assessment to make a determination,
- Evaluate all areas of your child's suspected disability,
- Be sufficient and comprehensive to identify all of your child's special education and related service's needs, and
- Must not be culturally, sexually, or racially discriminatory.

THE EVALUATION REPORT

The education team members will collaborate to create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare with others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what instructional or related services are recommended to help your child. You will be provided a copy of the report, and the team will convene a formal meeting to discuss the results with you.

If you do not agree with the report, you may request that additional school-based testing or an independent educational evaluation (IEE) be conducted. An IEE is an assessment by an outside professional paid for by the school system. If you decide to request an IEE the school will provide you with a list of independent evaluators that you may select to do your child's testing. The school is also allowed to deny your request for an IEE. In that event, it must take additional steps to show that its evaluation is appropriate.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY

After the initial evaluation has been completed, the IEP team will meet formally to decide whether your child qualifies for special education services. To be eligible, the student must have a qualifying disability, and the disability must require special education services to benefit from his or her public school education. The evaluation data is the basis for eligibility. There are thirteen disability categories recognized in Alabama and they are:

1. Autism,
2. Deaf-Blindness,
3. Developmental Delay,
4. Emotional Disability,
5. Hearing Impairment,
6. Intellectual Disability,
7. Multiple Disabilities,
8. Orthopedic Impairment,
9. Other Health Impairment,
10. Specific Learning Disability,
11. Speech or Language Impairment,
12. Traumatic Brain Injury,
13. Visual Impairment.

Each disability category has specific qualification requirements that are described in the Alabama Administrative Code. Your child's evaluation team will review the testing data to determine if and which category your child may qualify for special education and related services. If your child meets qualification guidelines, the evaluation team will ask that you provide written consent for your child to receive special education and related services.



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DIFFERENT EVALUATIONS FOR DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS

Evaluation is a repeating component of the special education process. In addition to confirming eligibility during the initial evaluation, an evaluation also drives your child's special education programming needs and IEP development. The first assessment that takes place as a result of a referral to special education is called the **initial evaluation**. This evaluation assesses your child in all areas of suspected disability and lays the groundwork for the IEP team to determine your child's eligibility for services. The initial evaluation also sets the first baseline for special education programming and monitoring of progress.

Under the law, your child must be reevaluated at least every three years. The purpose of the **reevaluation** is (1) to determine whether your child continues to be eligible for special education, and (2) to take a current look at your child's educational needs. The IEP team will review existing records and data and decide whether additional evaluations are needed. The parent is a part of the IEP team.

After reviewing the records, the IEP committee may decide no new evaluations are needed and your child continues to qualify for special education services. Or, the team may decide a reevaluation is needed, in which the planning team will determine which specific assessments are needed. The plan may include new evaluations in all areas, only in those areas in need of updating, or in new areas that haven't been assessed before. The evaluation team must again obtain your written consent to reevaluate your child.

Evaluations may also be considered appropriate when new information may assist the team **to meet the needs of changed circumstances** or needs of the student. In this case, this does not have to include all areas as before in the initial or reevaluation, but rather can be completed in the areas of concern or change to gather new information.

Evaluation is also required when your child is being considered for **testing out** of special education services or prior to services being discontinued. Evaluation is also required if your child is graduating. However, evaluations that occur at graduation or exiting of high school may be focused on obtaining information that will help your child to plan and **transition** into their career, postsecondary or college courses, and independent living needs.

RESOURCES

Additional information about Alabama's referral and evaluation process may be found on the Alabama State Department of Education's Special Education Services page at: <https://www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/Pages/home.aspx>

APEC IS HERE TO HELP

APEC's AL PTI provides free training, information, and consultation to families schools, and communities. Visit our training calendar for more information about learning opportunities at www.alabamaparentcenter.com or call our center. The contents of this publication were developed in part under a grant from the US Department of Education, #H328M150012. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Gregory Knollman. Special Education V.7



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