



# Help for Parents: How to Prepare for a Special Education Evaluation Planning Meeting

The special education evaluation planning meeting is very important. The evaluation will:

- Gather information to determine whether your child has a **qualifying disability**
- Include information to determine your child's **eligibility** for beginning or continuing special education services
- Include results that the team will use to decide on **special education and related services** for your child

**First, some background.** Public schools, which include charter schools, must conduct a special education evaluation:

- Before initially providing special education or related services to a child with a disability (initial evaluation)
- At least once every three years for children currently receiving special education (reevaluation)

Parents may request an evaluation if they have concerns.

People often think of tests when they hear the word “evaluation.” However, a special education evaluation involves more than tests. School professionals may also observe your child and use other procedures, such as interviews, to assess your child's:

- Health
- Speech and language abilities
- Emotional, behavioral, and social functioning
- General intelligence
- Academic performance
- Sensory functioning (including vision and hearing)
- Vocational interests and abilities
- Motor abilities
- Functional skills
- Transition to adulthood skills (when age appropriate)

## The important role of parents

Schools must involve parents in planning the evaluation. This is typically done at an evaluation planning meeting. The plan is developed after discussion among district staff and parents, all of whom provide input in determining all areas of suspected disability and needs. The evaluation should identify the things your child does well in addition to those that are difficult. It is important to be sure the evaluation results will be complete and accurate.

As the expert on your child, you have valuable information to share with the people who will assess your child. Parents know their children as no one else does. You are the only member of this team who sees your child in many different environments. Long after the last teacher or therapist has disappeared from your child's life, you will be there to support and encourage your child.

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You can make the difference now by sharing what you know about your child, asking questions, and helping to develop your child's evaluation plan. You have the perspective of a lifelong and close connection, and you know the learning history of your child. Be sure the evaluation plan includes a discussion with you for an opportunity to share what you know about your child.

### **Before the meeting**

The evaluation should identify all needs, even those not commonly linked to your child's disability category. Here are some questions for you to think about:

- What are the typical symptoms or characteristics of your child's disability?
- Does your child have all or some of them?
- How does this disability affect your child's learning as a unique individual?

Take a close look at your child.

- What are his or her strengths?
- What are his or her interests?
- What are your concerns in regards to education?
- In what areas do you think your child is learning more slowly than his or her peers?
- What can you share about your child that may help the evaluators? For example:
  - Timmy is shy around people he does not know. Spending a few minutes playing with him helps him become more comfortable.
  - Cole gives up easily, but it is effective to encourage him to do his best.
  - Erin's behavior varies from day to day. Please test her over a few days, not just one.

Next, look at the list of evaluation areas given above. In which areas do you have concerns? You don't need to know the name of tests or methods of evaluation. You might simply say:

- "I have a concern about my child's handwriting (motor ability). Can we test to find out why it is so difficult for him?"
- "My baby isn't crawling yet. My other child was crawling by this time. Will this evaluation show how far he is behind?"
- "My child can do the arithmetic, but he struggles with the math word problems. Can you test his ability if the math problem is read to him?"
- "I know my child has a short attention span. Can we check how long he can sit or pay attention?"

As you can see from these examples, you can bring your child's learning-related concerns to the evaluation team.

**If this is a three-year reevaluation**, it's a good idea to reread the previous evaluation and consider:

- Do you have any concerns you didn't have three years ago?
- Is your child at or near the age of transition to adulthood? During ninth grade at the latest, students must be evaluated in the transition areas of postsecondary education, employment, and, if needed, independent living.
- Has your child made progress in certain areas where you no longer have a concern?
- What evaluation will be done to show how much progress the child has made in areas of concern?

If you and the school do not have a concern in an area, it does not need to be evaluated. If you all agree that the school already has enough information in a given area, it does not need to be evaluated (however, that information should be included in the evaluation report). If the school thinks an area needs no reevaluation, they must inform you of their decision and advise you of your right to disagree and request evaluation of that area.

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Once you and the school have discussed what should be evaluated, **the school will write an evaluation plan.** The school must provide you with a prior written notice that describes the proposed evaluation plans and procedures. This notice must also address any areas of evaluation that you requested and the school has refused to include in the plan, including their reasons for doing so. If this is an initial evaluation, you have 14 calendar days to respond in writing. The initial evaluation cannot begin without your written permission to evaluate. If this is a reevaluation, you again have 14 calendar days to respond. If the school does not receive a written response of “no,” they can proceed with the evaluation.

If you look at the written plan and disagree with it in any way, contact the evaluation lead person (name will be on the form), ask your questions, and sign “no” if necessary. The school will then work with you to resolve any disagreements. Once you agree, the evaluation report and a discussion of the results must be completed within 30 school days.

**If you need more information on this topic, feel free to contact:**

- Your school district’s director of special education: [http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MdeOrgView/contact/contactsByContactType?contactRoleTypeCode=SPEC\\_ED\\_DIR\\_Contact](http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MdeOrgView/contact/contactsByContactType?contactRoleTypeCode=SPEC_ED_DIR_Contact)
- PACER Center: [PACER.org](http://PACER.org)
- Minnesota Department of Education: <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/fam/sped>