What Is Special Education?

Special education is a set of services and supports designed to help children with disabilities learn and succeed in school. It is not a place, but rather a personalized plan to help each child reach their full potential.

Children who qualify for special education receive an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is a legal document that outlines a child's unique needs and the services the school will provide to support them. These services might include specialized instruction, speech therapy, occupational therapy, or classroom accommodations.

Special education is guided by a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law ensures that every child has the right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)—meaning your child should learn alongside their peers as much as possible, with support if needed.

The goal of special education is to help your child:

- Make progress in school
- Develop independence
- Build skills for life

As a parent or guardian, you are an important part of the team that works together to support your child's success.

@SchoolPsychSaavy

Special Education Evaluation Timeline



Step 01

Referral for Evaluation

A referral is made by a parent, teacher, or other school personnel due to concerns about a student's learning or behavior.

Review of Existing Data Meeting

Determine whether additional information is needed to assess a student for special education eligibility or reevaluation

Step 02

Has to take place within 30 days of the referral





Step 03

obtain within 30 days of suspecting a disability

Parent Consent

Written parental consent is required before any formal evaluation can begin.

Evaluation Begings

A comprehensive process used to determine whether a student has a disability that affects their ability to learn and if they qualify for special education services.

Step 04

Once consent is received, the school has **60 calendar days** (federal guideline) to complete the initial evaluation.





Step 05

Eligibility Meeting

Decide whether the student qualifies for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

@SchoolPsychSaavy

@SchoolPsychSaavy

What Happens in a RED Meeting?

During a RED meeting, the IEP team (which includes educators, specialists, an the parent/guardian) reviews:



- Academic performance and standardized test scores
- Classroom observations
- Previous evaluations and interventions
- Behavior reports
- Attendance records
- Input from teachers and parents

Possible areas that could be assessed:



- Vision
- Hearing
- Health
- Motor
  - Fine, Gross, Sensory
- Speech
- Langauge
- Cognition
- Adaptives
- Social / Emotional/ Behavioral
- Academic Achievement
  - Reading
  - Math
  - Written Expression

Purpose of a RED Meeting:



- For **initial evaluations**: To decide if existing data is sufficient to suspect a disability and warrant a full evaluation.
- For **reevaluations**: To determine if updated assessments are necessary or if current data is enough to make eligibility or programming decisions.

Who to expect to be in a RED meeting? (possible participants)



- Classroom Teacher
- School Psychologist
- Interventionist
- Speech Language Pathologist
- Administration
- School Counselor
- Specail Education Teacher

Outcomes of a RED Meeting:



1. No further testing is needed – The team uses current data to make decisions.
2. Additional testing is required – The team seeks consent to evaluate further.

How can you as the parent prepare?



- Highlight areas of strength and concern.
- Write down what you've noticed at home (e.g., struggles with homework, behavior, speech, attention) and come with examples!
- Think about how your child is doing socially, emotionally, and academically.
- Bring any reports or notes from doctors, therapists, or tutors who have worked with your child.

Differences

Cognition vs Academics

Cognition is about how a child's brain processes information.

- Think memory, attention, problem-solving, reasoning, processing speed, and how well they can hold and manipulate information in their head.
- It's the "engine" that powers learning—more about the mental skills underneath schoolwork.

Academics are the skills kids show in school.

- Reading, writing, math, spelling—what we actually test and grade.
- These are the products or outcomes that we can measure with things like classroom assessments or standardized achievement tests.

"Cognition is like the computer's processor; academics are the programs or documents you create. A strong processor usually helps, but you can have a fast processor and still need to learn how to use Word or Excel."

Speech vs Language

Speech is how the sounds come out.

- The physical side: making sounds with the mouth, tongue, and vocal cords.
- It includes pronunciation (articulation), fluency (stuttering or smoothness), and voice quality (pitch, volume, tone).
- If a child has a speech delay or disorder, you might hear sounds left out, sounds swapped (like "wabbit" for "rabbit"), or a voice that's unusually hoarse or nasal.

Language is what the words mean and how we use them.

- Understanding and using vocabulary, grammar, and sentences.
- It covers both receptive language (understanding what's said) and expressive language (putting thoughts into words).
- A language delay or disorder might show up as trouble following directions, using short phrases well past toddler years, or difficulty telling a story in order.

What are parents' roles during special education meetings?

Share Insights About Your Child

Offer valuable input about your child's strengths, challenges, interests, and needs—both at home and in the community.

Ask Questions

Seek clarification about evaluations, services, goals, or terminology you don't understand. It's okay to pause the meeting for explanations.

Review Data and Reports

Request to review assessment results, behavior data, progress monitoring, and classroom performance. Ask how the data supports decisions.

Collaborate on Goals

Provide input on IEP goals to ensure they are meaningful and reflect your child's individual needs and priorities.

Advocate for Services

Suggest or ask about supports, accommodations, or services that have worked (or not worked) in the past.

Follow Up

Review the finalized IEP that is sent to you and follow up on next steps, timelines, or services discussed.







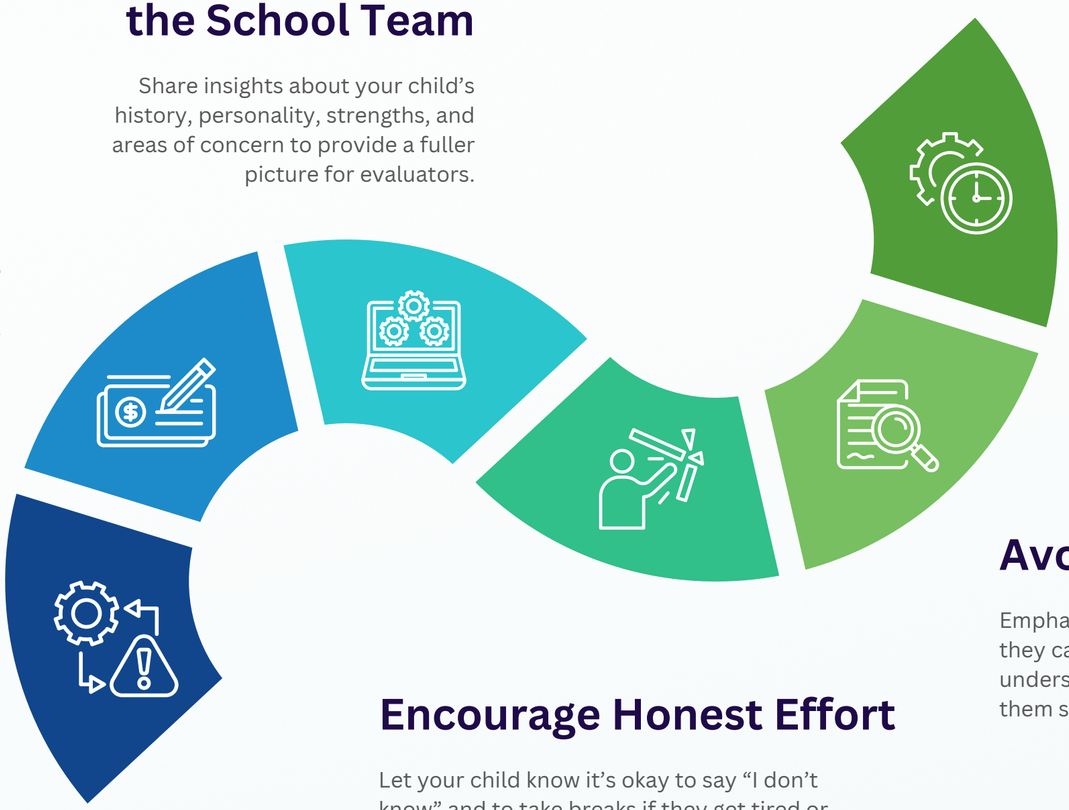

How Parents Can Support a Child During a Special Education Evaluation

Collaborate with the School Team

Share insights about your child's history, personality, strengths, and areas of concern to provide a fuller picture for evaluators.

Stay Positive

Keep routines consistent and provide encouragement, especially on testing days. A good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast go a long way.



Reassure and Normalize

Explain the evaluation in a calm, positive way. For example:
"Some kids learn in different ways, and this will help us figure out how to help you best."

Avoid Labels or Pressure

Emphasize that the evaluation is not a test they can pass or fail—it's just about understanding how they learn and what helps them succeed.

Encourage Honest Effort

Let your child know it's okay to say "I don't know" and to take breaks if they get tired or frustrated during testing.

Prepare for Follow-Up

After the evaluation, talk with your child about the next steps in an age-appropriate way, especially if services or support plans will be discussed.

@SchoolPsychSaavy

Parents Frequently Asked Questions

Why is my child being evaluated?

01

Your child may be showing signs of difficulty in academic, behavioral, or social-emotional areas. The school team has noticed these challenges and wants to better understand your child's needs to determine if they qualify for special education support.

Who will conduct the evaluation?

02

A team of trained professionals such as a school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, special education teacher, or occupational therapist will evaluate your child depending on the areas of concern.

Do I have to give permission?

03

Yes. Written parent/guardian consent is required before the school can begin any evaluation. You have the right to agree or decline, and you can ask questions before signing.

How long does the evaluation take?

04

Once you provide consent, the school typically has 60 school days (or the timeframe defined by your state) to complete the evaluation and hold an eligibility meeting.

Will I be involved in the process?

05

Absolutely. Parents are key members of the evaluation team. You will be asked to share insights, complete checklists, and attend meetings to discuss findings and next steps.

What happens after the evaluation is complete?

06

The school will hold an Eligibility Determination Meeting to review the results with you and determine if your child qualifies for special education services.

@SchoolPsychSaavy

Parents Frequently Asked Questions

07 Will this label my child?

If your child is found eligible, they will qualify under a specific eligibility category (e.g., Specific Learning Disability, Autism, Speech-Language Impairment). This is used to guide support—not to label. Services are personalized, and privacy is protected.

08 What services might my child receive if eligible?

Services can include specialized instruction, speech therapy, counseling, occupational therapy, accommodations, or a tailored Individualized Education Program (IEP) depending on their needs.

09 What if I disagree with the results or plan?

You have the right to request changes, ask for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), or file a disagreement. Your voice is an important part of the decision-making process.

10 Can I bring someone with me to the evaluation meetings?

Yes. You are encouraged to bring a support person, such as a family member, advocate, or friend. They can help take notes, ask questions, or just offer support.

11 Will my child be pulled out of class often?

During the evaluation, your child may be pulled briefly for testing, but the team will minimize disruption to their learning. If they qualify for services, the IEP team will discuss the best way to support your child—either in or out of the classroom depending on their needs.

12 What if my child doesn't qualify for special education?

If your child is not found eligible, the school team will still work with you to explore other support options.
This might include general education interventions, Section 504 accommodations, counseling, or academic support programs to help your child succeed.

Common Special Education Acronyms



Individualized Education Program

A legal document that outlines the services, goals, and supports for a student with a disability.



Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

A federal law that guarantees special education services to eligible children.



Least Restrictive Environment

The setting where a student with a disability can learn alongside peers without disabilities as much as possible.



Multi-Tiered System of Supports

A framework for providing varying levels of academic and behavioral support based on a student's needs.



Response to Intervention

A tiered system of support focusing on early help in academics/behavior.



Functional Behavior Assessment

A process to understand the reason behind a student's challenging behavior.

@SchoolPsychSaavy