

Questions Often Asked by Parents

Why isn't my child learning as fast as the other students? Why is the school so concerned? How do schools evaluate how much my child is learning? What measurements or tests do they use, and what exactly are they looking for? Why are they asking me all of those personal questions? How do I request that the school test my child for a disability?

All of these questions are valid and deserve answers. Many of these answers can be found in the data, or results, of what is called an **initial evaluation for special education services**. According to both Wyoming and Federal rules, a parent, school district, or public agency may initiate a request for a full and individual evaluation. Parents can request an evaluation by submitting a written request to the school. If a teacher or other school employee requests the evaluation, parental consent is still required before the school can move forward. Once the school receives signed permission, a **prior written notice** will be mailed to parents to make them aware of the next steps.

As previously stated, parents have the right to request evaluations. If the school refuses to evaluate a child, they must still send the parents **written notice** as to why they made that decision. Parents have the right to contest the school's decision through various dispute resolution procedures (contact the Parent Information Center for more information).

What Does a Comprehensive Evaluation Look Like?

This differs for every child and depends on the areas of concern, but the law is clear in that an evaluation must utilize a "variety of assessment tools." Since parents generally know their children better than anyone, it is important that they communicate any concerns they might have so that those can be included in the evaluation. For example, if you are aware that your child is easily overstimulated, you may want to request that a sensory assessment be included in the evaluation.

Some other areas that might be assessed as part of a comprehensive evaluation include:

- Vision/Hearing
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Sensory issues
- Cognitive abilities
- Academic skills
- Social skills/ behavior
- Classroom observations
- Parent and student interviews
- Medical doctors if there is a concerning a health issue
- Speech articulation or language development

Many of these areas involve assessments that compare your child to other children your child's age. However, schools are required to look at the whole child and not at scores alone. Although many assessments are focusing on areas of what your child might need, it is important to talk about the different ways your child learns, what his or her strengths and interests are, and any strategies that you have found to be helpful.

The Parent Interview

Parent input is extremely valuable, and schools are required to seek feedback from parents during evaluations. However, some parents may feel that the parent interview is invasive or that the school is "digging" for information. Parents do not have to give any information that they do not wish to share, but information from parents can provide important insight about a child. One reason for the interview is to identify factors that might be contributing to a child's difficulties. For example, a child's medical and developmental history might help paint a clearer picture of what is happening with the child. Another reason for the parent interview is to find out what concerns you have in regard to your child's education. This information can help guide the school's evaluation as well as your child's educational program.

The Timeline

In Wyoming, once a school receives signed parental consent for an evaluation, they have **60 days to complete the evaluation** and hold a meeting with parent(s) to review the results. If a child is found to be eligible for Special Education, **the school has 30 days to implement and develop an Individualized Education Program, or IEP.**

The Determination

During the meeting, all the gathered data will help the team (including the parents) determine whether the student has an educational disability. In Wyoming, there are 13 different disability categories, and each of them has their own set of criteria.

If the team agrees that a (1) a child has a disability that (2) impacts his or her educational performance and (3) requires special education supports and services, then an IEP will be developed.

If a student does not appear to meet criteria for special education, then the reasons why will be discussed during the meeting. The discussion can include other options for meeting the child's needs, including classroom interventions, specific school programs, or Section 504 accommodations (contact the Parent Information Center for more information).

What if Parents Disagree?

If parents disagree with the school's evaluation, they have the right to request an **Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)**. This must be done in writing prior to making an appointment with an outside evaluator. Educational evaluations can be conducted by qualified examiners, such as licensed clinicians and psychologists. The school can provide parents with names of qualified examiners and is responsible for the cost. After the results of the independent evaluation are received, the school district must *consider* them in determining whether a child meets criteria for special education.

Continuing the Evaluation Process

While your child is receiving special education, the school district must conduct a comprehensive evaluation at least every three years to determine continued eligibility.

Sometimes the school might propose that they have enough information to determine a child will continue to be eligible for special education supports and services without conducting additional assessments (tests). Parents may agree with this determination, or they may choose to ask for a full re-evaluation to get current information about their child's needs and the progress their child had made.

Things to Remember about Evaluations for special education supports and services:

1. Parents may request an evaluation.
2. After receiving signed consent for testing, the school has 60 days to complete the evaluation.
3. The evaluation should be at no cost to the parents.
4. Interviewing the parent and the child are part of the evaluation process.
5. The evaluation must be comprehensive, using more than one measuring tool.
6. If parents disagree with the results, they may request another evaluation by someone not employed by the school district.
7. The results of the evaluation should directly correlate to the services on the IEP.
8. Parents have a voice in this process and are encouraged to share strengths, interests, and positive things about their child.
9. Carefully weigh the pros and cons of completing a full three-year re-evaluation before making a decision.
10. If you don't understand the language being used, ask for clarification and examples.

For more information about Initial Evaluations

CONTACT:



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INITIAL EVALUATIONS

Disability Brochure #25



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