

Parent's Quick Guide to Special Education

"Must evaluate in all areas of suspected disability"

Parents have the right to request that their school conduct any evaluation or assessment to address any areas of concerns they have for their child. Put the request in writing.

How to know which evaluations to ask for?

When you refer your child to the Committee on Special Education (CSE), there are some evaluations schools are required to do:

**Psychological Evaluation:** this includes an IQ test, which is used to measure your child’s cognitive functioning and ability which is reflective of how your child is capable of performing; and

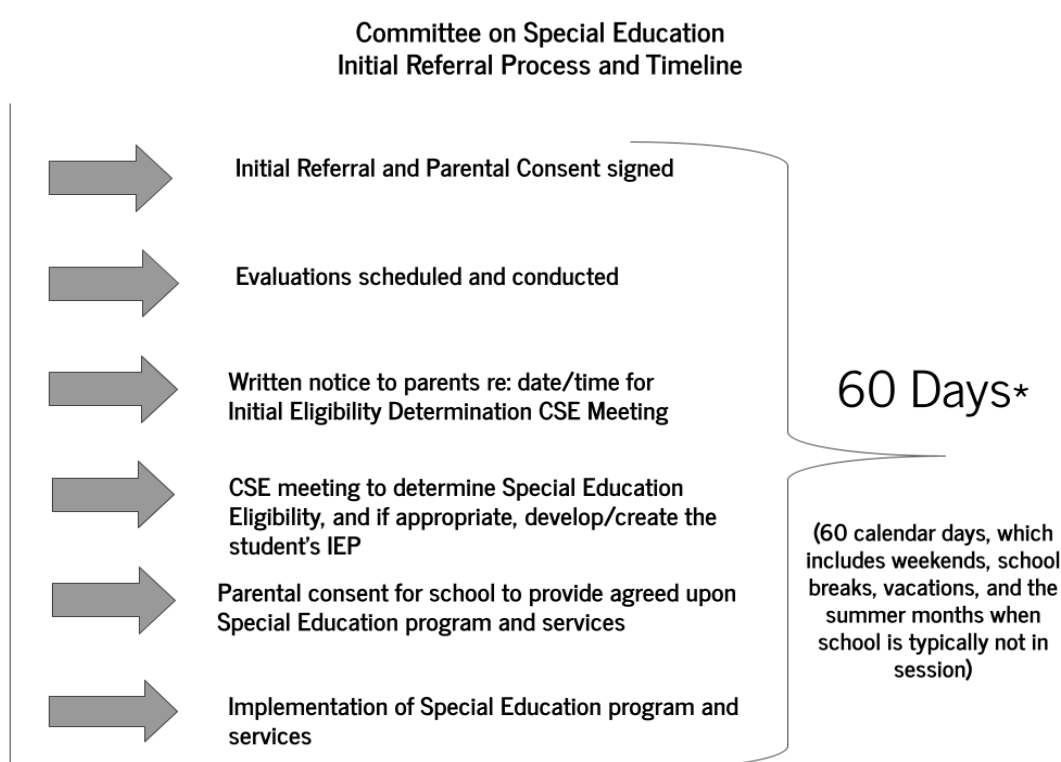
**Educational-** this is used to measure and assess the levels at which your child is actually performing and achieving in specific academic subject areas.

When there is no educational disability present, a student’s IQ scores and educational/achievement scores will look very similar. *Please note: if the two sets of scores aren’t very similar, this does not automatically mean the child has an educational disability.*

**Social History:** an interview conducted by the school social worker with the parent to understand the child’s history- developmental milestones, medical conditions, areas of concern the parent had or has for their child, child’s strengths and interests; family background information, siblings, history of medical or mental illness, etc.

**Classroom Observation:** usually completed by the school psychologist, simply a brief, random, and unannounced observation of your child during the school day/in the classroom. They report on your child’s behavior in the class (paying attention, head down, not doing the work, participating/raising their hand, etc).

How Long Does the Initial Referral Process Take?



There are additional evaluations which may be requested by the school district or the parent at any time to ensure that all areas of suspected disability are evaluated. Oftentimes, parents aren't sure what to ask or that they can ask for additional testing. Here are some common concerns parents have, red flags you may notice, and the appropriate evaluation to request when you have certain concerns about your child and their progress in school.

If you have **concerns about your child's social-emotional well-being**, or if your child is exhibiting some of the following:

- an inability to wake up in the morning;
- a lack of interest or desire to go to school;
- somatic complaints (stomach aches, nausea, headaches), mostly when it’s time to go to school or throughout the school day;
- lack of, or decrease in, participation with extracurricular activities or social interaction with peers from school;
- and/or behaviors which result in disciplinary action (ie out of school suspensions)

You have the right to request a **Psychiatric Evaluation** through the Committee on Special Education to determine if there is an underlying emotional disability which is impacting your child’s ability to appropriately access their education.

If you have **concerns about your child's ability to express themselves**:

- their thoughts, feelings, and ideas;
- understand and process what's being said to them;
- follow and execute multi-step directions;
- speak clearly; and/or
- produce spoken words in a way that makes sense

You have the right to request a **Speech and Language Evaluation** to have your child’s “receptive” and “expressive” language skills specifically assessed to determine whether or not their language skills are impacting their ability to be educated.

If you have **concerns about or have noticed difficulty** with your child’s ability to:

- use their arms, legs, and torso for walking, jumping, kicking, sitting upright, lifting, and throwing a ball;
- use their hands and fingers for writing, grasping small objects, using buttons, snaps, and zippers on clothing;
- use their vision to perform tasks/hand-eye coordination, cutting shapes, tying shoes, writing or coloring between appropriate lines, copying shapes and symbols correctly; or
- to make sense of what their eyes see, such as putting together puzzle pieces, completing mazes, connect the dots, or reading a clock;

You have the right to request an **Occupational Therapy Evaluation** to have your child’s gross motor skills, fine motor skills, visual motor skills, and visual perceptual skills assessed to determine if any of those difficulties are true deficits which may be impacting their learning.

If you have **concerns about how your child acts in school** and/or if:

- you receive phone calls/emails from your child’s teacher about their behavior;
- your child receives multiple detentions, in-school or out-of-school suspensions for behavioral reasons;
- your child’s report cards and progress reports reflect certain challenges during the school day such as:
  - social skills,
  - impulse control,
  - compliance, or
  - following instructions/directions

You have the right to request a **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)** to determine through observation and data collection what, if anything, is occurring right before and triggering your child’s behaviors.

If you have **concerns about your child's ability to learn and progress despite receiving Special Education services, or if you:**

- feel additional information is necessary to understand your child’s specific learning disability, their educational needs, and the services or interventions they require in school,
- suspect there are multiple disabilities impacting your child and you are concerned the school isn’t addressing each one appropriately, or
- just aren’t sure what is going on with your child and the existing evaluations and data doesn’t explain or show why your child is having so much difficulty with academic learning

You have the right to request a **Neuropsychological Evaluation** through the Committee on Special Education to understand the extent of their disability, to confirm or exclude the presence of another disability, and to have a specialist tease out the impact each separate disability is having on your child and the impact the combined disabilities are having on your child.

Example of when to request a neuropsychological evaluation:

If a child is diagnosed with ADHD and classified as a student with an Other Health Impairment (OHI), they might receive services and accommodations to address their difficulties with focusing, processing information, and impulsivity such as:

- an integrated co-teaching/inclusion classroom setting with additional teacher support;
- a Resource Room to provide small group instruction in areas of weakness or to work on skills related to their disability; and/or
- extra time for tests or the ability to take their tests in a separate location to reduce external distractions.

A student who has ADHD and presents with those needs could absolutely learn and make appropriate progress with the above supports, however, if that child continues to struggle in a specific area despite those supports, it is possible that the child also has a learning disability impacting them in a specific area, such as reading (i.e. dyslexia).

Many parents suspect something else is going on with their child but sometimes when a student is classified and receives Special Education services, no further testing is conducted by the school because they don’t believe it’s necessary.. because the child is already receiving services.

If this student with ADHD also has undiagnosed dyslexia, it won’t matter how much extra time they are given to take their tests or to complete assignments, and it won’t matter if they are already in a resource room or a smaller Special Education classroom. This student will never learn how to read appropriately because individuals with dyslexia require a specialized reading program to be provided by a reading teacher who has been trained and certified for that specific program. This student will never receive the appropriate Special Education services unless a comprehensive evaluation is completed and all areas of disability are acknowledged and appropriately addressed.

Neuropsychological evaluations look at all areas of the student’s cognitive function and academic achievement- the evaluation won’t just show a “weakness” in reading, it will be able to specify why there is a weakness in reading, what’s causing it, how it impacts the student in the educational setting, and specific programs, services, and accommodations the school needs to provide for that student.