

## What Parents Should Know...

# About Evaluation and Re-evaluation

### Why Should You Evaluate Your Child?

*As a parent, you may have concerns about your child's behavior, school performance or your child is having trouble paying attention to tasks. Your child's teacher may also have concerns. You may request an evaluation for your child. This can be a hard decision for many families. Here are some benefits of having your child evaluated.*

**1. It is the first step toward getting your child help.**

An evaluation can lead to your child getting needed support to thrive at school. The school will use the results to decide if your child is eligible.

**2. It helps you and the school understand your child's challenges.**

The testing will show exactly which skills your child is struggling with. That includes academic and cognitive skills, along with social-emotional skills and behavior concerns. Testing will also shed light on your child's strengths. Having that information lets you and the school use your child's strengths to work on areas of need.

**3. It helps the school provide targeted support.**

If your child is eligible, the school will use the evaluation results to create an IEP. This legal plan provides the specific help your child may need. That help may include: individualized instruction, supports like accommodations, and therapies like speech-language or occupational therapy. The IEP will include specific goals for your child and ways to measure progress.

**4. It can be a relief for you.**

Nobody wants to find out their child has challenges. But not knowing for sure can create stress and uncertainty. When you learn more about why your child is struggling, it is easier to reach out for support for yourself and your child.

**5. It can be a relief for your child.**

Many kids feel better knowing there is a reason for their difficulties. An evaluator can explain to kids why they are struggling. Just having a name for their challenges can be a relief.

**6. It sheds light on strategies that can help at home.**

When you understand what your child is struggling with, you can find tools and approaches to help outside of school. There might be assistive technology that makes things easier, like text-to-speech, or simple tools like calendars, timers, and pencil grips that can ease everyday challenges.



# Your Child's Evaluation...Understanding the Process

By law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act or IDEA), schools must provide special help to eligible children with disabilities. This help is called special education and related services. As parents, you may ask the school to evaluate your child, or the school may ask you for permission to do an evaluation. If the school thinks your child may have a disability and may need special education and related services, the school must evaluate your child before providing your child with these services. This evaluation is at no cost to you.

In South Dakota, the initial evaluation must be completed within 25 school days after the district receives a signed parent consent, unless other timelines are agreed to by the school administration and parents. Written evaluation reports, determination of eligibility and conducting an IEP team meeting must be completed within 30 calendar days from the end of the "25 school days" evaluation.

## The evaluation will tell you and the school:

- **if your child has a qualifying disability; and**
- **what kind of special help your child needs in school.**

## Step 1: Using What is Known

A team of people, including you, will be involved in evaluating your child. They will begin by looking at what is already known about your child. This will be done by looking at your child's school file, recent test scores, and any other information from you or your child's teachers that will be necessary to give a complete picture of your child.

The evaluation team needs enough information to decide if your child has a disability. It also needs to know what kind of special supports your child needs. Is there enough information about your child to answer these questions? If your child is being evaluated for the first time, there may not be sufficient information.



## Step 2: Collecting More Information

The team of people involved in your child's evaluation, including you, will identify what additional information is needed to determine if your child has a disability and what kind of supports he/she may need. With your permission, the school may conduct additional testing to collect that information. They must explain to you what the evaluation of your child will involve. Your child is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, as applicable: health, vision, hearing, social and emotional skills, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.

## The evaluation should also include:

- The observations and opinions of professionals who have worked with your child.
- Your child's medical history when it is relevant to his or her performance in school.
- Your observations about your child's experiences, abilities, needs, and behaviors in school and outside of school, and his or her feelings about school.

Professionals will observe your child. They are trying to get a picture of the “whole child.” It is important that the school evaluate your child in all areas where he or she might have a disability.

For example, they will want to know more about:

- How well your child speaks and understands language.
- How your child thinks and behaves.
- How well your child adapts to change.
- What your child has achieved in school.
- How well your child functions in areas such as movement, thinking, learning, seeing, and hearing.
- What job-related and other post-school interests and abilities your child has, (important when your child is nearing 16 years old, or sooner, if appropriate).

Evaluating your child completely will help you and the school decide if your child has a disability. The information will also help you and the school plan instruction for your child.

## Deciding if Your Child is Eligible for Special Education

The next step is to decide if your child is eligible for special education and related services. This decision will be based on the results of your child’s evaluation and the policies regarding eligibility for special services. The school will discuss your child’s scores on tests and evaluations and explain what they mean.

- Is your child doing as well as other children his or her age?
- What does your child do well?
- Where is your child having trouble?
- What is causing the trouble?

If you don’t understand something in your child’s evaluation results, be sure to speak up and ask questions. This is your child. You know your child very well. Do the results make sense, considering what you know about your child? Share your special insights. Your knowledge of your child is important.

Based on your child’s evaluation results, the team will decide if your child is eligible for special education and related services. Under IDEA, you have the right to be part of any group that decides your child’s eligibility for special education and related services. This decision is based in part on IDEA’s definition of a “child with a disability”. This is a two-part criterion:

1. A child must have a disability that fits into one or more of the 13 disability categories.
2. As a result of the disability, the child must require special education services (specially designed instruction). Your child does not have to be failing school and may be moving from grade to grade.

A child may not be identified as having a disability primarily because he or she speaks a language other than English and does not speak or understand English well. A child may also not be identified as having a disability just because he or she has not had enough appropriate instruction in math or reading.



As a parent, you have the right to receive a copy of the evaluation report on your child at no cost to you. You also have the right to receive a copy of the paperwork about your child's eligibility for special education and related services.

If your child is eligible for special education and related services (such as speech therapy) and you agree with this determination, then you and the school will meet and talk about your child's special educational needs. However, you can disagree with the decision and refuse special education and related services for your child.

If your child is found eligible for special education and related services and you agree, the next step is for the team to write an IEP. If your child is **not** eligible for special education and related services, the school must tell you in writing. You must also receive information about what to do if you disagree with this decision. If this information is not in the materials the school gives you, ask for it.

- You have the right to disagree with the eligibility decision and be heard.
- You may ask how the school will help your child if he or she will not be getting special education services.
- If you disagree with the results of evaluations, as a parent you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation.

## IDEA Disability Categories

The purpose of evaluations are to gather information to make decisions about eligibility, educational strategies, and placement options. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) lists several categories of disability that are the basis for eligibility for special education services.

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deafness
- Deaf-Blindness
- Emotional Disability
- Hearing Loss
- Intellectual Disability (Cognitive Disability in SD Administrative Rules)
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech/Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Vision Loss
- Developmental Delays for children through ages 3 - 8. (SD Department of Education category only)



### Additional Resources:

[SD Department of Education Eligibility Guide](#)

[US Department of Education, IDEA](#)

[Wrightslaw](#)

[Center for Parent Information & Resources](#)

# Tool: A Checklist for Evaluation Requests

South Dakota Parent Connection and Disability Rights South Dakota have created the guide, "[Dare to Dialogue...Reach YES!](#)" This resource is for families of children receiving special education to help assist in advocating for their child's right to an appropriate education. Included in the guide is a checklist created for parents and educators that will help identify areas of concern and/or reasons for a referral. The checklist can be found on page seven of the guide.

## Language Arts

- Vocabulary - spoken
- Recognizes letters of the alphabet
- Knows sounds of letters of the alphabet
- Recognizes words
- Vocabulary - reading
- Understands what he/she reads
- Reading speed and accuracy
- Expressing thoughts in writing
- Spelling/punctuation
- Sentence/paragraph structure
- Difficulty listening
- Other

## Numbers/Mathematics

- Telling time
- Counting money
- Measuring
- Basic math facts
- Calculations
- Word problems
- Geometry
- Problem-solving
- Measurement
- Probability/data
- Analysis
- Math reasoning
- Other

## Behavior/Social

- Noncompliance
- Lack of motivation
- Self-concept/esteem
- Peer relationships
- Adult relationships
- Changes in relationships with family/friends
- Withdrawn/moody
- Overactive/underactive
- Isolates self
- Irrational fears
- Verbally aggressive
- Physically aggressive
- Fearful/anxious
- Repetitive behaviors
- Difficulty adjusting to change in routine
- Limited interests and activities

- Unusual interests
- Obsessive interests or behaviors
- Emotionally unstable
- Difficulty sleeping
- Decreased energy
- Irritable
- Easily distracted
- Self-destructive
- Overly sensitive/cries easily
- Poor social boundaries
- Unusual response to typical stimuli
- Bullied by others
- Bullies others
- Seeks attention in inappropriate ways
- Unaware of dangers
- Sexualized behaviors
- Other

## Health/Medical

- Problems with vision
- Problems with hearing
- Concussion or traumatic brain injury
- Loss of consciousness
- Seizure
- Stroke
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Diagnosed congenital disease
- Overweight/underweight
- Fatigued/listless
- Frequently gets hurt
- Diagnosed medical condition
- Medication
- Physical complaints
- Diagnosed mental health condition
- Other

## Communication

- Difficulty expressing what he/she wants to say
- Difficulty understanding what he/she hears
- Difficulty repeating what is said
- Uses gestures instead of words
- Appears to not hear what is said
- Loss of acquired vocabulary
- Limited vocabulary
- Student speech difficult to understand
- Student non-verbal
- Other

## Motor (Muscle) Skills

- Copying
- Handwriting
- Walking/running
- Throwing/catching
- Fine Motor (hands/fingers) coordination
- Gross motor (arms/legs/trunk) coordination
- Moving from sitting to standing
- Moving from standing to sitting
- Transitioning from class to class
- Frequent falls
- Balance/reflexes
- Concerns with child safety
- Commode transfer
- Walks on tiptoes
- Unusual hand movements/posturing
- Other

## Study/Work Skills

- Disorganized
- Making transitions
- Avoids difficult tasks
- Poor problem solving
- Abstract thinking difficulties
- Poor judgment
- Following directions
- Starting tasks
- Completing tasks
- Does not work independently
- Remaining seated
- Concentration/attention span
- Excessive daydreaming
- Turning in assignments
- Difficulty with memory
- Other

## Daily Living Skills

- Toileting
- Dressing self
- Feeding self
- Drinking from cup
- Communicating basic wants/needs
- Safety (self or others)
- Understanding/responding to social cues
- Gullible/naïve

# Four Evaluation Musts

## **More Than One Procedure**

Evaluation results will be used to decide if your child is a “child with a disability” and to determine what kind of educational program your child needs. These decisions cannot be made based on one procedure such as only one test.

## **Trained Evaluators**

The people who test your child must know how to give the tests they decide to use. They must give each test according to the instructions that came with the test.

## **No Discrimination**

Each test must be given in a way that does not discriminate against your child because he or she has a disability or is from a different racial or cultural background.

## **Using Native Language**

The evaluation must be conducted in your child’s native language or other means of communication (sign language).

### **PARENT TIP:**

Ask to receive and review evaluation reports BEFORE meetings so you are better prepared to participate.

# Types of Evaluations

There are several types of evaluations/tests. A multi-disciplinary team evaluation process determines whether a student becomes eligible or remains eligible for special education services. The team should consider any exceptionality of the child in the choice of evaluation procedures. Evaluations must be done in all areas of suspected disability.

As a parent, you are a member of the evaluation team. Before you sign and return an evaluation consent form, you can participate in a pre-evaluation conference to talk with a school professional about who will conduct each evaluation, what evaluations would be helpful, when your child will be taken out of classes to be tested, and where your child will be given the tests. During the evaluation process, evaluators may see the need for additional testing and will ask parents for permission to conduct additional testing.

Various evaluations that may be conducted by the school depending on the area(s) of suspected disability and the age of your child include:

**Educational Evaluation** — Evaluation of school academic performance, in relation to the general education curriculum, including reading, written language, spelling, and math.

**Psychological Evaluation** — Evaluation by a school psychologist may include, but is not limited to intelligence testing, educational achievement testing, personality evaluation, and vocational interest evaluation. Different assessment tools may be used, depending on the age and abilities of the student.

**Speech and Language Evaluation** — Evaluation of: 1) receptive language, which is the ability to understand spoken language; 2) expressive language, which is the ability to formulate and organize oral language and written language; 3) phonological processing which is the ability to use individual sounds within words; 4) articulation, voice, auditory memory, and pragmatics which are the ability to use language effectively to interact with people.

**Adaptive Behavior** — Evaluation of behavior in school and may include social skills or a Standard Rating Scale completed by at least two teachers, parent and if appropriate, the student.

**Occupational Therapy (OT) Evaluation** — Evaluation of self-help skills, fine motor skills, visual motor integration, visual perception, and sensory integration or sensory processing.

**Physical Therapy (PT) Evaluation** — Evaluation of body strength, coordination, balance, symmetry in movement and control of body, and how student plans new motor activities.

**Social/Family History** — Includes a description of pertinent family history, individual developmental/ medical history, and estimates of adaptive behavior at home, in the neighborhood, and in peer groups.

**Teacher Assessment/Observation** — Evaluation by the classroom teacher(s) includes current information on the student's present level of performance in the general curriculum and in specialized school settings.

The South Dakota Department of Education, Office of Special Education (DOE) reminds parents that skill-based assessment information is to be gathered on each skill area affected by the disability. The SD DOE offers a quick reference guide which lists skills to assess in each of the IDEA disability categories (listed on page 10). Access the [\*"Tools and Resources Related to Special Education Eligibility"\*](#) here.

## My Child Has An IEP, Why Re-evaluate?

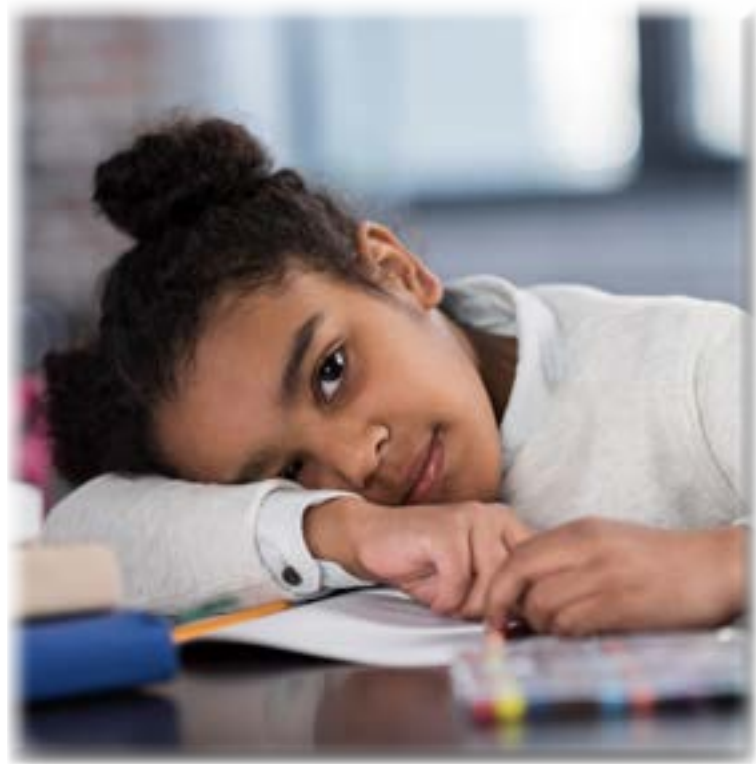
Once a child is eligible for special education services, IDEA law requires consideration of a re-evaluation every three years. The cover page of the IEP lists the date of the previous evaluation and the date of the next scheduled evaluation. The re-evaluation must reflect all areas of suspected disability, including any new areas of concern.

The results of a re-evaluation first indicate whether the student is still eligible for special education and related services. Sometimes a re-evaluation shows that a child no longer needs or qualifies for services. A child's IEP cannot be discontinued by the school without justification presented in re-evaluation data. A re-evaluation provides information for the multi-disciplinary team to use to update the IEP. In this process, the team must also consider any other information that is presented by the parents from a physician, counselor, or other outside evaluator. If there is disagreement about the results of the re-evaluation, parents can request an Independent Educational Evaluation.

The same timelines apply to a re-evaluation as the initial evaluation in South Dakota — 25 school days for testing after consent is signed, and then 30 calendar days in which to meet for review once the testing is complete. If there is a reason to grant more time for testing, the timeline can be extended, and the new agreement must be documented. If the team agrees that an evaluation should be done in one or more areas in fewer than three years, this can be done.

Many assessment tools should not be used twice in a year, to avoid the possibility of a "practice-effect," with the student getting higher scores because it is familiar. In each discipline, there are choices among measurement tools.

If the team, which includes the parent(s), determines that a re-evaluation process would reveal no new information, there can be agreement to skip it. Re-evaluation should be considered again at the next annual IEP meeting or at any time that a team member wants to discuss it. In an initial evaluation, the school district may not evaluate if the parent/guardian does not sign a consent form, unless a hearing officer approves it. For a re-evaluation, however, if the parent does not sign the consent form, after reasonable efforts, the district may proceed with the re-evaluation.



# When to Request an Independent Evaluation

Procedural safeguards in the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) assure that if parents disagree with a school's evaluation, they have the right to an independent educational evaluation (IEE) to address the areas in dispute. While the school may ask parents why they disagree with the school's evaluation, parents do not have to provide their reason(s). However, it is always encouraged to keep communication open in writing with your school. An IEE is an evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the district responsible for the education of your child.

The school has choices. It can arrange for the IEE or may have the parent select an evaluator based on applicable criteria. While the school can suggest providers of an IEE, the list cannot be unduly limiting. Parents can, within reason, select any evaluator who meets the criteria. If the school objects to paying for an IEE, the parents may file a complaint and have a hearing officer rule whether the original evaluation is appropriate and sufficient.

If parents arrange an IEE on their own, without going through these steps, the parents will be responsible for these costs. Regulations state that when a parent shares information with the IEP team, it must be considered, but that does not require the school or the team to agree with it or to implement any of its recommendations.

## Additional Resources

### South Dakota Parent Connection

[www.sdparent.org](http://www.sdparent.org)

- [What Parents Should Know...About Special Education in South Dakota](#)
- [Understanding School Testing and Test Scores](#)

### South Dakota Department of Educations, Special Education Programs

[www.doe.sd.gov/sped](http://www.doe.sd.gov/sped)

- [Parental Rights and Procedural Safeguards](#)



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