

Understanding Special Education Evaluation and Reevaluation

A special education evaluation helps families and schools understand a child's strengths and needs. It can show whether a child qualifies for special education and what support may help. A reevaluation checks whether those needs have changed. You are part of the team at every step.

What is an evaluation and reevaluation?

An initial evaluation begins when a parent or school staff member raises a concern about a child's learning or development. The team first looks at information it already has and decides what else it needs to know. The school gives you written notice of its decision to accept or deny the request to evaluate. Before new testing for an initial evaluation, it must explain what it plans to do and get your written consent. Agreeing to an evaluation does not mean you agree to special education services.

An evaluation may include schoolwork, classroom observations, talks with you and teachers, and assessments by trained staff. The team looks at all areas where a disability is suspected. These might include learning, communication, behavior, daily living skills, movement, hearing, or vision. It uses more than one source of information and considers your child's language and background. A medical diagnosis is useful information, but it does not decide eligibility on its own.

After the evaluation, you and the team review the results together. The team decides whether your child meets the requirements for special education and needs specially designed instruction. If they qualify, the team uses the results to plan an Individualized Education Program (IEP). If your child does not qualify, consider asking what other school supports may help and whether a Section 504 evaluation is appropriate.

In South Dakota, the initial assessments are generally completed within 25 school days after the district receives your signed consent. The written report, eligibility decision, and IEP team meeting are completed within 30 calendar days after that period. Ask the school for your child's expected dates.

A reevaluation checks whether a child still qualifies and whether goals or services should change.

It happens at least every three years unless you and the school agree it is unnecessary. You or a teacher may request one sooner when needs change. The team reviews existing information first and decides if new tests are needed.



Why is this important?

The results of the special education evaluation give the team a fuller picture of your child. They can explain what is going well, where your child needs help, and which supports may work. The results also help the team plan goals, services, and ways to track progress. Reevaluations help the IEP keep pace as your child grows. If the team decides no new testing is needed, the school must tell you why and explain that you may request assessments to determine continued eligibility and needs. You can ask how the information supports any proposed changes to your child's services.

What is my role in the evaluation process?

You know your child in ways the school may not see. Share strengths, interests, concerns, what helps at home, and how your child feels about school. You may bring outside reports or medical information that relates to learning at school. Listen to what teachers and other staff see, and ask the team to consider the full picture together. You can ask for a copy of the report and for results to be explained in everyday words.

If you disagree with an evaluation, tell the team what concerns you and ask to discuss the information. You may request an independent educational evaluation at public expense. The district must explain its response and next steps. Your procedural safeguards describe this right and other ways to address disagreements.

Questions to ask

- What are my child's strengths, and what concerns do we share?
- What questions will the evaluation help us answer?
- Which areas will the team review or test, and why?
- What information from home or outside providers would help?
- If this is a reevaluation, what has changed since the last one?

Parent tips

- **Write it down.** Bring notes about your child's strengths, concerns, and questions so you can share them at the meeting.
- **Ask for clear words.** If a score or term is confusing, ask what it means for your child in class.
- **Plan together.** Talk about supports your child needs now, whether or not your child qualifies for special education.
- **Keep a copy.** Save the written notice, consent form, report, and team decisions for your records.
- **Watch the companion session.** This brief is part of the IEP Journey learning series from South Dakota Parent Connection which can be found at <https://bit.ly/4kLhSg9>.
- **Learn more.** South Dakota Parent Connection has created a guide to help IEP teams better understand the special education evaluations. Download it here: <https://bit.ly/3Ha2acf>

South Dakota Parent Connection is Here to Help!

We offer free support, information, and resources to families across South Dakota.



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