



Why should I have my child evaluated?

Educational evaluations are an important part of any school's decision on whether to provide special education services, and which services are appropriate for each child. They can help the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team to identify the areas in which a child is succeeding, as well as the areas in which the school needs to provide more support.



How do I start the evaluation process?

The school needs to start the evaluation process as soon as they suspect a child might have an educational disability. While that process can be initiated by the school, you can start that process yourself by telling the school that you suspect your child might have a disability. We recommend that you write the school an email in which you state that you think your child might have a disability, and ask to sign a form, typically called "Consent to Evaluate," giving your permission for the school to evaluate your child.

What kinds of educational evaluations are there?

There are many different evaluations out there, but a few of the most common categories are:



Cognitive

These evaluations measure your child's ability to reason and solve problems, and can be used to determine whether your child has an intellectual disability.



Speech and Language

These evaluations measure your child's ability to communicate with others (expressive language), understand when others communicate with them (receptive language) and their ability to use language in social situations (pragmatic language).



Motor Skills

These evaluations measure your child's ability to engage in specific physical tasks like writing or walking, and can help decide whether a child might benefit from occupational therapy.



Social and Emotional

These evaluations measure how your child interacts with other children and adults, and how your child behaves in different situations. This domain includes



Adaptive Testing

Measures an individual's daily functioning. This assessment can provide vital information necessary to determine appropriate supports and services.



Academic

These evaluations measure your child's ability to engage in some of the common skills used in the classroom, such as reading, spelling, handwriting and mathematics.

Will my child be evaluated in all of these areas?

No, the school will only evaluate your child in the areas in which you or the school suspect there might be a disability.

What is the timeline for the evaluation process?

Once you've signed the Consent to Evaluate, the school has 60 days to perform the evaluations and provide you with the results of those evaluations. Usually, the school will also call a new IEP or 504 team meeting to see if the results of the evaluations mean that your child qualifies for more or different services on their IEP.

What if the school wants to delay the evaluation process?

Sometimes, a school will ask you to delay signing the Consent to Evaluate so they can measure your child's responses to interventions or put into place a multi-tier service system. You do not have to agree to that delay – the 60-day clock starts as soon as you sign the Consent to Evaluate, so we recommend signing it as soon as possible.

What if my child was already evaluated recently? Do I need to wait three years for the next IEP eligibility meeting?

No, if you suspect your child has a disability that wasn't addressed by the last IEP meeting, then you have the right to have a new meeting that considers the new information.

My child was evaluated by a private professional. Can those evaluations be considered by the school?

If your child has already been evaluated by an outside professional, that evaluation report should also be considered by the IEP team. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires the school team to consider the recommendations from the private evaluation; however, it does not require them to accept the recommendations. The school might still want to perform additional evaluations to get a better picture of your child's abilities. It's also important to remember that a medical diagnosis and an educational diagnosis are not always the same – sometimes a child can be medically diagnosed with autism, but not meet the criteria for special education under autism, or vice-versa.

What if I disagree with the conclusions of the school's evaluation?

If you disagree with the evaluation the school performed, you can ask for an independent educational evaluation, conducted by someone who doesn't work for the school district. The independent evaluation should be conducted in all areas where you disagree with the results. The school district is required to pay for this independent evaluation, unless they prove that the independent evaluation isn't necessary through a due process hearing.

What if I need help understanding the evaluation reports?

That's okay! Evaluations are complicated and can be difficult to understand. Asking for the evaluation report before the meeting will give you extra time to process the information. If you have questions, you can reach out to the team member who conducted the assessment ahead of time or bring your questions to the meeting. Luckily, the advocates at your local chapter of the Arc are happy to work with you to make sure you understand the evaluations and are prepared to take the next steps.