

The Special Education Process

The special education process is one that generally *begins within the school's Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)*. Both RTI & MTSS are an array of procedures and interventions that can be used to determine if and how students respond to specific changes in instruction. This framework provides a school wide process and structure for school teams in designing, implementing and evaluating educational interventions. Interventions may address learning concerns or behavior concerns or both. Interventions, accommodations and adaptations are monitored over time. Based upon a student's response to these changes, no additional supports may be deemed necessary. If it is determined that further supports are necessary, a parent conference is held to review progress and data. At that time, the team may recommend the student be evaluated for special education.

Once parents sign permission for a special education evaluation, a series of events begin culminating in an Individual Education Program (IEP) team meeting. The IEP team is comprised of a parent(s), the student (if appropriate) a general education teacher, a special education teacher and other special education staff who took part in the evaluation process. Building and district administrators may also be involved. Potential members may include: a school psychologist, a school nurse, a school social worker, a speech/language pathologist, an occupational and/or physical therapist, a teacher of the hearing impaired and/or a teacher of the visually impaired. Depending on the reason for the referral, any one of these professionals may be part of the evaluation team. Potential areas of assessment may include: academics, communication, physical health, gross and/or fine motor skills, intellect, behavior and/or independent living skills. The entire process is referred to as 'Child Find'. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA) school districts are responsible for the assessment, identification and provision of services for students ages 3-21 eligible for special education.

During the first meeting, *the team will review the Evaluation Report*, which is a summary of what has gone on in the assessment process, including the interpretation of evaluations and implications for instructing the student. A Determination of Disability is completed and if the student qualifies for special education, the team begins drafting an IEP. The child's strengths are the focus of the IEP meeting and the areas of educational need help determine what goals and/or objectives are developed. The IEP will include how skills will be taught and how progress will be monitored. Accommodations and modifications are delineated and the amount of service time the student will receive from special education staff is agreed upon. Students are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment, which always considers time in the general education classroom a priority. Progress toward goals is shared with parents quarterly, the IEP is reviewed annually and every three years the team reassesses to determine whether the student continues to be eligible for and have need for the specialized instruction that the IEP provides. A parent may request that the IEP team convene at any time during the school year.

The case manager, typically the special education teacher, is a parent's primary communication contact if questions or concerns arise at any time during the school year.