

< Evaluation basics

The School Evaluation Process: What to Expect



By Amanda Morin



At a Glance

- A school evaluation is a process with multiple steps.
- All of a student's skills are looked at during the evaluation process.
- Families and teachers both play a role in an evaluation.

What happens during the school evaluation process? A key part of that question is the word *process*. That's because in the case of school evaluations, *evaluation* doesn't mean the same thing as *test*.

It's called an evaluation process because there are a series of steps that go into it. A school evaluation looks at a student's areas of challenge and strengths. Doing just one test or assessment wouldn't provide all the information an IEP team needs to make decisions about services, supports, and interventions.

In most schools, an evaluation is called a *comprehensive educational evaluation*. Keep in mind that not all schools handle this evaluation process the same way. But here's an overview of the main things to expect before, during, and after an evaluation.

Before an Evaluation

When a student is referred for evaluation, a team usually meets to discuss the referral. That team includes teachers who work with the student, as well as the student's family, a special education teacher, and a school administrator.

Together, the team talks about the reasons for referral and

decides what assessments the student needs. They then make an evaluation plan that outlines the recommended testing. That may include:

- **Psychological evaluation:** This takes a closer look at the student's emotions, behavior, and social skills.
- **Psycho-educational testing:** This involves cognitive testing and achievement testing. Cognitive testing focuses on how a student processes information. Achievement testing focuses on academics—how a student does with school-related skills, based on age or grade.
- **Interviews:** These may be in person or via questionnaires with the student's family, teachers, and the student. The goal is to get a detailed look at the student's social, functional, and academic history.
- **Classroom observation:** This gives the evaluator a sense of how the student functions in the classroom.
- **Functional behavioral assessment (FBA):** This is to get a better understanding of any struggles with behavior that may have been getting in the way of learning.
- **Other evaluations:** These may include speech-language, physical therapy, occupational therapy, or other specialized evaluations, if necessary.

An evaluation looks at all areas of a child's development, and at least two professionals evaluate and observe. The professionals who evaluate students:

- Have training and credentials in the area of development they're testing, like speech and language
- Have experience working with kids
- Know the expected behaviors and skills of kids of various ages

- Share information to help get the best picture of a student

What families need to know before evaluation: As your child's parent or legal guardian, you have to give written consent before the testing happens. As you look over the evaluation plan, ask questions before you provide consent. Here are some questions to ask:

- Are these tests the right ones to figure out if my child has a "suspected disability"? (If you're not sure what the tests are, ask the **IEP case manager or coordinator** to explain.)
- What does each test measure?
- What's the format of the test (like written or verbal)?
- Is there a specific purpose for the classroom observation?
- Will the observation be done during a class that my child is struggling in?
- Which evaluator will work with my child?
- What are the evaluator's credentials and experience?

During an Evaluation

For the most part, the evaluation testing happens at school. (Sometimes, if a school district doesn't have a specific type of evaluator on staff, a student may have to go to an outside professional's office.)

If a student is taking many different tests, the evaluation may take place over many days. But it all has to be completed within 60 days of the referral for evaluation, unless your state has implemented a different timeline.



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On top of using standardized tests or other methods to learn about a student's skills, the professionals read and review a student's records, work samples, and screenings. They also speak with families, teachers, and the student.

What families need to know: You may or may not be present during your child's testing, depending on the type of assessment and the school's policies. Even if you're not there, you can still play an active role.

Ask to be informed when testing will take place. That gives you the opportunity to get your child ready. (Keep in mind, though, that **kids shouldn't "study" for an evaluation.**) Expect to hear from the evaluator about finding time to share information. But if you don't hear, it's OK to reach out to set up some time.

Your child will probably be pulled out of the classroom to participate in some testing. **Talk with your child ahead of time** so it doesn't come as a surprise. Letting your child know that these aren't the kind of tests you study for may reduce stress.

After the Evaluation

Once the evaluation is done, each evaluator writes a report about the results of their part of it. The report includes

information about why the student was referred for testing. It should also provide scores and a summary of what the evaluator learned.

Many reports also give recommendations for how to help a student. The IEP team will talk about these recommendations at the **eligibility meeting**. The original team and the professionals who evaluated the student have this meeting to go over the results and to determine if the student is eligible for special education services.

What families need to know: You have the right to see evaluation results at least three business days before the eligibility meeting. If you haven't gotten a copy before then, get in touch with the IEP coordinator to ask for them.

At the eligibility meeting, be sure to ask questions. You're an important part of the team working to find solutions for your child. And speak up **if you don't agree with the results**. You also should put your objections in writing.

The information from an evaluation can point everyone in the right direction to help a student. If you're a parent, read more about **preparing for an evaluation**.

Are you an educator? Learn more about what to expect and **how to participate in an IEP meeting**.

Key Takeaways

- A school evaluation includes both testing and observation.
- An IEP case manager coordinates evaluation testing.

- The evaluation results help the IEP team decide whether a student needs special education services.

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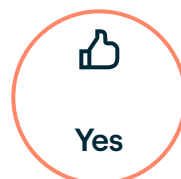
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