



Preparing for an Early Childhood Educational Evaluation: Tips for Your Child and You

Background

The public school system provides educational evaluations for young children when either parent, physician, child care provider, or First Steps provider suspects a developmental delay or disability that could significantly affect performance in school. This may be your first experience with an educational evaluation or the school's special education process. If your child is receiving services from First Steps, the school will need to conduct an evaluation and plan for services before he/she turns 3 years old. This document provides information to help parents prepare for an educational evaluation.

General Information: Before the Evaluation

- If your child is receiving First Steps services, talk with therapy providers regarding any concerns you have about your child. Collecting information about your child's progress during therapy, as well as at home, will help determine whether an educational evaluation should occur, and if so, what disability area(s) are suspected. With your permission, a representative from the school can be invited to attend your child's transition conference and/or Individual Family Service Plan meeting.
- If your child attends a child care program or preschool, talk with your child's teacher about your concerns. They may have suggestions for interventions or activities to try before considering an educational evaluation.
- You can request an educational evaluation for your child, verbally or in writing, by contacting the local school corporation or special education cooperative. After you request an educational evaluation, the school must respond to you within 10 school days as to whether they will or will not conduct the evaluation.
- An educational evaluation can only be started after you, the parent, give written permission, which is also called giving consent.
- If after giving permission for an evaluation you change your mind, notify the school and, if your child is in First Steps, your Service Coordinator, of your decision in writing.
- When you sign permission for evaluation, you will receive a copy and explanation of the *Notice of Procedural Safeguards*, which is also called your parent's rights. This information will help you understand what to expect both during and after the evaluation process. *Navigating the Course: Finding your way through Indiana's Special Education Rules* is another document that helps to explain these rights. Both of these documents can be found on the Indiana Department of Education website at <http://www.doe.in.gov/achievement/individualized-learning/laws-rules-and-interpretations> .
- Each educational evaluation is completed by the special education department at the school corporation or special education cooperative and is individualized for the student. Different areas of development will be evaluated depending on the area(s) of concern and suspected delays. The area(s) that will be evaluated are listed on the written permission for testing.



General Information: Before the Evaluation (cont.)

- The members of the school's assessment team (or multidisciplinary team) will depend on the developmental area(s) of concern identified for your child. There is usually one person designated as the coordinator for this team. This could be an assessment team member, such as the school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, or preschool teacher or could be someone such as the school counselor or social worker.
- Find out who you should call with questions or concerns and keep that person's name and phone number handy. Whenever you talk to this person, write down the date you spoke and the information you discussed.
- Many evaluations include an observation of your child. Observations can take place in a variety of settings depending on where your child spends his/her time and the behaviors that need to be observed. The evaluation team will arrange any needed observations with you.

General Information: After the Evaluation

- After the evaluation is complete, an educational evaluation report will be written. You will receive a copy of this report. If you would like for this report to be available to you at least five school days prior to the case conference, be sure to indicate this on the written consent for testing.
- The case conference is the meeting where the evaluation results will be discussed, and it will be determined whether your child is eligible for special education and related services. You are an important member of the case conference committee. If your child is found eligible, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be developed.
- The evaluation results will be reviewed at the case conference; however, you may also request a meeting to discuss the evaluation results before the case conference. You should indicate this on the written permission for testing as well. If you request this, the meeting will be held within 5 school days prior to the case conference.

Timelines

After the school receives your written permission for the evaluation, the evaluation will be completed. The timeline for the evaluation depends on the type of evaluation.

- For initial evaluations of children who were not receiving First Steps services, the evaluation will be completed within 50 school days.
- For children receiving First Steps services, the evaluation must be completed, eligibility determined and, if eligible, a plan developed for services to begin by the child's third birthday.
- For a reevaluation, if the child is being tested to reestablish eligibility for special education and related services, the evaluation will be completed by the student's next annual case conference meeting.
- If the child is being reevaluated to determine if he/she is eligible for services under a different or additional disability area, the evaluation will be completed within 50 school days.
- If the child is being reevaluated to inform the case conference committee of the student's needs, such as the need for assistive technology or a related service, the evaluation will be completed within 50 school days.



Talking With Your Child

Every child is different. As a parent, you will decide how much advance information to share with your child about the upcoming evaluation. Use the following information to guide this conversation.

- Keep the experience positive. Explain to your child that he/she will visit a school and will meet some teachers and other grown-ups. The teachers and grown-ups will ask him/her to do things like play with toys, look at books, complete puzzles, draw, and listen to and repeat information.
- Typically young children do best when told about the school visit the day before or of the appointment. Tell your child who will take them to the appointment, what they will be asked to do, and whether you will stay at the school during the appointment.
- Most children have fun doing the activities at the evaluation meeting and are sometimes rewarded for participation with a sticker, pencil, or treat.
- Talk with your contact person at the school about your child's favorite activities and what information you should share with your child before the school visit.

Preparations for the Evaluation

For children not yet attending school, an appointment(s) for the evaluation will be scheduled with you. If your child is currently attending a special education preschool classroom and this is a re-evaluation to prepare for the transition to kindergarten, you may or may not be notified about the date(s) of the evaluation in advance. During the evaluation time period, keep the following routines to help your child be prepared for the evaluation:

- Keep a consistent bedtime for your child so that he or she gets a good night's sleep.
- Feed your child a healthy breakfast each morning or have him or her eat breakfast at school.
- Be sure that your child has glasses, hearing aids, or other needed devices at school each day.
- Continue to consistently give your child any medications prescribed by his or her doctor.
- Avoid scheduling vacations or appointments during this time period if possible.

Providing Input

You know your child better than anyone else and your input to the multidisciplinary team is extremely important. The following suggestions can help you more effectively contribute to the evaluation.

- To help the evaluation team get to know your child before the meeting, please complete developmental history forms, rating scales, and release forms as quickly and thoroughly as possible and return them to school or to the designated office (sometimes parents are provided with an addressed envelope).
- Feel free to ask any questions you have and seek clarification when you do not understand something.
- Ask for assistance if you need an interpreter, or help with reading or completing forms. If your native language is not English, ask the assessment team to provide information in your native language.
- If you have copies of any relevant medical reports, outside evaluations, or therapy reports that you are willing to share, consider letting the school make copies for the assessment team. It can sometimes take a long time to receive these directly from a hospital or other medical provider.



Communicating With The Assessment Team

- Don't hesitate to communicate with the assessment team about your child or the evaluation.
- Many parents find it useful to create a file, folder, or binder to collect your child's information.
- During the evaluation time period, please notify your child's teacher (if he/she attends school) if your child is not feeling well, or had a rough night or morning, so that this can be relayed to the assessment team and testing can be avoided on that day.
- If your child is not currently attending school, consider your child's nap and eating schedule when scheduling the appointment for the evaluation.
- If your child is particularly anxious about the evaluation, please let an assessment team member know.
- Clearly communicate any food allergies your child has to the assessment team, because sometimes a snack or treat is given to students as a reward for effort.
- Contact an assessment team member if you have questions or concerns about how a particular part of the evaluation session went before receiving the evaluation report.
- After you receive the evaluation report, make note of any questions or concerns you have so that you will remember to ask about these things prior to or at the case conference.
- Alert the contact person to any changes in your address or phone number.
- If you are unsure of what questions you should ask, consider inviting someone to attend the case conference with you. If you do not have someone to go with you, ask the school for suggestions about who you could talk to before the conference. You may also contact IN*SOURCE at 1-800-332-4433 at or About Special Kids (ASK) at 1-800-964-4746 for additional assistance.