

8. ASSESSMENTS

Sometimes the modifications and accommodations established by the Student Study Team are not enough to meet the child's needs. Sometimes the child's difficulties are too severe to be addressed by the Student Study Team using the resources of the regular classroom. In these situations, the child should be referred for assessment for possible qualification for special education. (See section on "Referral")

Assessment plans are established whenever a child is referred to special education. These plans outline the assessments (tests) and other information that will be used to determine if the child has a disability as defined by law. Assessment results will also be used to identify potential services for the child.

The child's parent or holder of the child's educational rights must approve the assessment plan before the child can be assessed. Assessments must then be completed before a child can receive the services of special education.



The assessment plan is created to:

- Address all suspected areas of need
- Determine if the child has a disability as defined by law
- Identify specific needs as a result of disability that cannot be met using the resources of regular education
- Identify the child's strengths and ways those strengths can be developed
- Develop a plan to implement services to address the child's needs utilizing the child's strengths whenever possible

The Student Study Team process CANNOT be used to delay acceptance of a referral for assessment.

Areas to assess

Information from past and present teachers, care providers, biological parents if possible, CASA, services providers and others can be used to identify potential areas of need. The child can also provide important information about his or her difficulties at school.

Needs can also be indicated by: poor grades and/or attendance, prior referrals to student study team, behavioral problems in the classroom and elsewhere, multiple illnesses or absences.

Assessment plans should address all potential areas of need including:

- Health
- Vision and hearing
- Social and emotional status
- General intelligence
- Academic performance
- Speech and language
- Self-care
- Behavior
- Coping skills
- Motor abilities

A **Functional Behavioral Assessment** should be conducted whenever a student exhibits a serious behavior problem with the potential to hurt the child or another person, or result in serious property damage. A functional behavioral assessment is designed to identify the causes of negative behavior and help establish positive interventions to minimize or eliminate that behavior. (See special section on “Behavioral Assessments”).

Assessments

- Cannot discriminate racially or culturally
- Must be administered in a pupil’s primary language or other mode of communication and must be given by someone knowledgeable in the child’s primary mode of communication if possible. The assessments must address the possibility and extent of the child’s disability and need for special education, rather than measuring the child’s English language skills
- Must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies including information provided by the parent (if available) or caregiver
- Cannot be designed to measure a single general intelligence quotient
- Must consider a child’s limitations in specific developmental areas such as impaired sensory, manual or speaking skills, and ensure that the test results accurately reflect the child’s aptitude or achievement level

Older students should also be assessed in the areas of vocational planning and life skills.

- Must address all areas related to the suspected disability
- Must include at least two methods of assessment for each potential area of need

Considerations when planning assessments

Child preparation: The caregiver and school staff should explain the need for assessments and the process that will be used to conduct assessments. The child’s emotional comfort should be considered at all times.

Location: Depending on the nature of the assessment, the child can be assessed at the school, at the office of a professional or elsewhere. It is important to consider the child’s comfort level when conducting assessments. A shy or fearful child may give more accurate results in a familiar area, with familiar adults or caregivers present.

Provider: School staff generally performs most assessments. If the child has a negative history with the school employee who conducts the assessments, the parent can request an evaluator who is not familiar with the child. The parent can also request an independent evaluation (addressed later in this section). If a child is uncomfortable with a particular gender, the evaluator should be chosen accordingly.

Process

- Tests should not take an unreasonable period of time considering the child’s age and ability level. Longer tests should be broken up into two or more sections.
- Assessments should be given to the child individually (not in a group).
- The parent or care provider may need to be present to aid communication, especially if the child is young or significantly impaired.
- An advocate may be present to increase the child’s comfort level during assessments.
- Assessments should be scheduled at the most appropriate time of day for the child. A younger child may be more alert and perform better in the morning. An adolescent may do better in the late morning or afternoon.

Advocates can request to participate in the assessment plan formation through a letter addressed to the principal, or Special Education coordinator of the school district.

Assessment plans should be completed for parent signature 15 days from the date of the initial referral.

Disagreements

Parents have a right to disagree with all or part of the assessment plan. They can also request additions, deletions or changes to the number and types of tests being proposed. Parents and advocates can consult appropriate professionals (i.e. pediatrician, counselor, social worker) if they are

not sure if the plan is adequate.

If the parent disagrees with part or all of the proposed assessment plan, he or she should inform the school in writing, including the reasons for the disagreement. Disagreements can arise if the parent feels the proposed assessments:

- Do not address all suspected areas of need
- Might not accurately reflect needs
- Do not accommodate the child's needs to accurately reflect a disability
- Are too extensive (too many tests for the same area)
- Unnecessary (prior, recent assessments exist for the area, or the area is not an indicated area of need)
- May not be accurate because of testing procedures—the environment, evaluator, etc.

If the school agrees to modify the assessment plan per parent request or if the parent agrees with the proposed plan, the parent should sign the assessment plan within 15 days.

If the school refuses to modify the assessment plan, the parent can file for due process (see special section on “Due Process”) or obtain an independent evaluation. Schools must consider independent evaluations when qualifying the child or determining service needs for a child with a disability.

Independent evaluations

The parent or surrogate parent of a potentially disabled child has a right to obtain an independent educational evaluation (performed by someone not working for the school system) whenever he or she feels an independent evaluation might be more appropriate.

A parent (or surrogate) may also have the right to an independent educational evaluation at public expense (school pays for the evaluation) if the parent believes the school districts evaluation is inaccurate or insufficient to identify all of the child's needs. However, the school or district may initiate a hearing to show that its evaluation is appropriate. If the final decision is that the evaluation is appropriate, the parents still have the right to an independent educational evaluation but at their own expense.

Reevaluation

A child previously diagnosed with a disability should be reassessed every three years or sooner if requested by the parent or advocate. The re-evaluation should include all previous assessments. Parents and advocates should also request assessments that will detect new or undiagnosed disabilities.

Additional help regarding assessments

Aside from the school district (which is mandated to provide a complete assessment of the student free of charge) other resources include:

- Regional Centers
- Department of Mental Health
- Private practitioners who, for a fee, Medi-Cal or sliding scale will assess the student
- Previous evaluations, assessments and/or testing may be used in the assessment process

Assessments must be completed and an Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting held within 50 days of the signed and approved assessment plan.

The IEP meeting will be used to review the results of all assessments, determine whether or not the child has a qualifying disability and if the child has a disability, what services the child needs as a result of his or her disability.

For more information:

Humboldt County Office of Education

901 Myrtle Ave.
Eureka, CA 95501
707-445-7043

Redwood Coast Regional Center

808 E Street
Eureka, CA 95501
707-444-3409

Humboldt County Public Health Department

712 4th Street
Eureka, CA 95501
707-445-6212

Humboldt County Department of Mental Health

1711 Third Street
Eureka, CA 95501
707-268-5728