

What is an initial evaluation? An initial evaluation is a comprehensive, individual assessment of your child. Various testing tools and data collection are used by the school system to determine if your child is eligible for special education services.

The Facts you should know:

- Parents/guardians must give permission before the school will conduct an evaluation. There will be a form you will be asked to sign. The form will list the kinds of tests the school may conduct.
- The school system has 60 calendar days from the day they receive your signed consent to determine eligibility for special education and related services. Writing a letter to request an evaluation does not mean you have given consent. School systems are required to make sure the consent you sign is *informed consent*, meaning the system has told you about all the types of tests that may be administered, why they are being administered and what to expect.
- The school system must show what they have tried to do to help your child with his/her learning difficulties. They should have documentation of the different strategies or methods they have used to help your child learn and data that shows your child is still not making acceptable progress toward learning grade level information. This is often called RtI (Response to Intervention) or the Student Achievement Pyramid of Intervention. RtI can be used when there are learning or behavior concerns. If the school does not have this information when an evaluation is requested, they will gather this information during the evaluation period.
- Eligibility for special education and related services is based on two factors: (1) Does your child have a disability? (defined by the 12 categories below) and (2) Does the disability impact the education (academic, functional and/or developmental areas) of the student? Your child must meet the requirements in at least one of the eligibility categories in order for special education and related services to be offered. A medical diagnosis is not the same as an educational disability, although many of the categories are similar. When a medical diagnosis is received and referred to the school, there are usually still evaluations the system needs to conduct and data to collect.
 - The categories for education include: Autism, Deaf-Blind, Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Emotional Behavior Disorder, Mild/Moderate/Severe/or Profound Intellectual Disability, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Significant Developmental Delay (up until age 9), Specific Learning Disability, Speech-Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment. Often children with a medical diagnosis may also be eligible under one of these categories.
 - If the answers are yes to both questions referenced above, then a child may be determined eligible for special education and related services by a group of individuals, which includes the parents.
 - If the student is eligible for special education and related services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed within 30 days.
 - If you disagree with the team regarding your child's eligibility decision, you may use the Dispute Resolution procedures to try to change the decision or resolve the disagreement.
 - If your child is not eligible for special education and related services, the school system will consider other ways to support the student, such as the Student Support Team (SST) or a 504 plan.
- A child may be referred for an initial evaluation through his/her public school, private school or parent/guardian.
 - Children enrolled in private schools within the boundaries of a public school system other than where they live may be evaluated by the public school system where the private school is located.
 - The same 60-day timeline applies to all students, whether they are students enrolled in home school, private school or public school.

Tips for Families:

- ✓ **Always put your request for an evaluation in writing. Give copies to your child's teacher, principal, and the special education director.**
- ✓ **Share any reports or evaluations about your child that you have from other programs or professionals, if you are comfortable doing so.**
- ✓ **Ask how you will be involved or give input during the evaluation process.**
- ✓ **Ask questions to help you understand what to expect, such as:**
 - Why do you want to evaluate my child?
 - What will happen if my child is NOT evaluated? Will he or she still get help for the problems that have been identified?
 - What do you think you will learn from the evaluation?
 - What kinds of test will be used? What areas will be tested?
 - Will someone observe my child in the classroom and talk to my child's teachers?
 - Who will evaluate my child? Has the evaluator had experience testing children who are similar to my child?
 - Does my child need a translator or interpreter? (Testing must be done in a child's native language or sign language if needed.)
 - When will I receive a written copy of the evaluation results?
 - What can I do if I do not agree with the evaluation results?
- ✓ **Ask for a copy of the evaluation report, if one is not provided.**
- ✓ **Ask to have the evaluation results explained if you do not understand them.**

Where to go for more information:

Parent to Parent of Georgia
770 451-5484 or 800-229-2038
www.parenttoparentofga.org

Georgia Department of Education, Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports
404 656-3963 or 800-311-3627 and ask to be transferred to Special Education
http://www.gadoe.org/ci_exceptional.aspx

Georgia Department of Education Implementation Manual
http://www.gadoe.org/ci_exceptional.aspx?PageReq=CIEXCImpMan
(See chapter on transition from early intervention to public school.)

Additional resources: Contact the **Special Education Director** for your school system.