



Understanding the Special Education Evaluation Process

Ohio Special Needs Family Information Roundtable

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Welcome and Introductions

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Why are you interested in
learning about the Special
Education Evaluation
Process?

The Special Education Process

The special education process can be confusing for parents for several reasons:

1. **Complex Legal Framework**
2. **Multiple Steps and Procedures**
3. **Educational Disability vs. Medical Diagnosis**
4. **Different Stakeholders Involved**
5. **Jargon and Technical Language**
6. **Timelines and Procedures**
7. **Decision-Making**
8. **Inconsistent Communication**
9. **Emotional Factors**

All these factors contribute to the overall complexity and confusion that parents experience during the special education process.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the definition of an educational disability
- Learn the key steps in the evaluation process
- Understand parent rights

What is an educational disability?

An **educational disability** is a condition that has a *significant adverse impact* to student's ability to access or make progress in the general education curriculum.

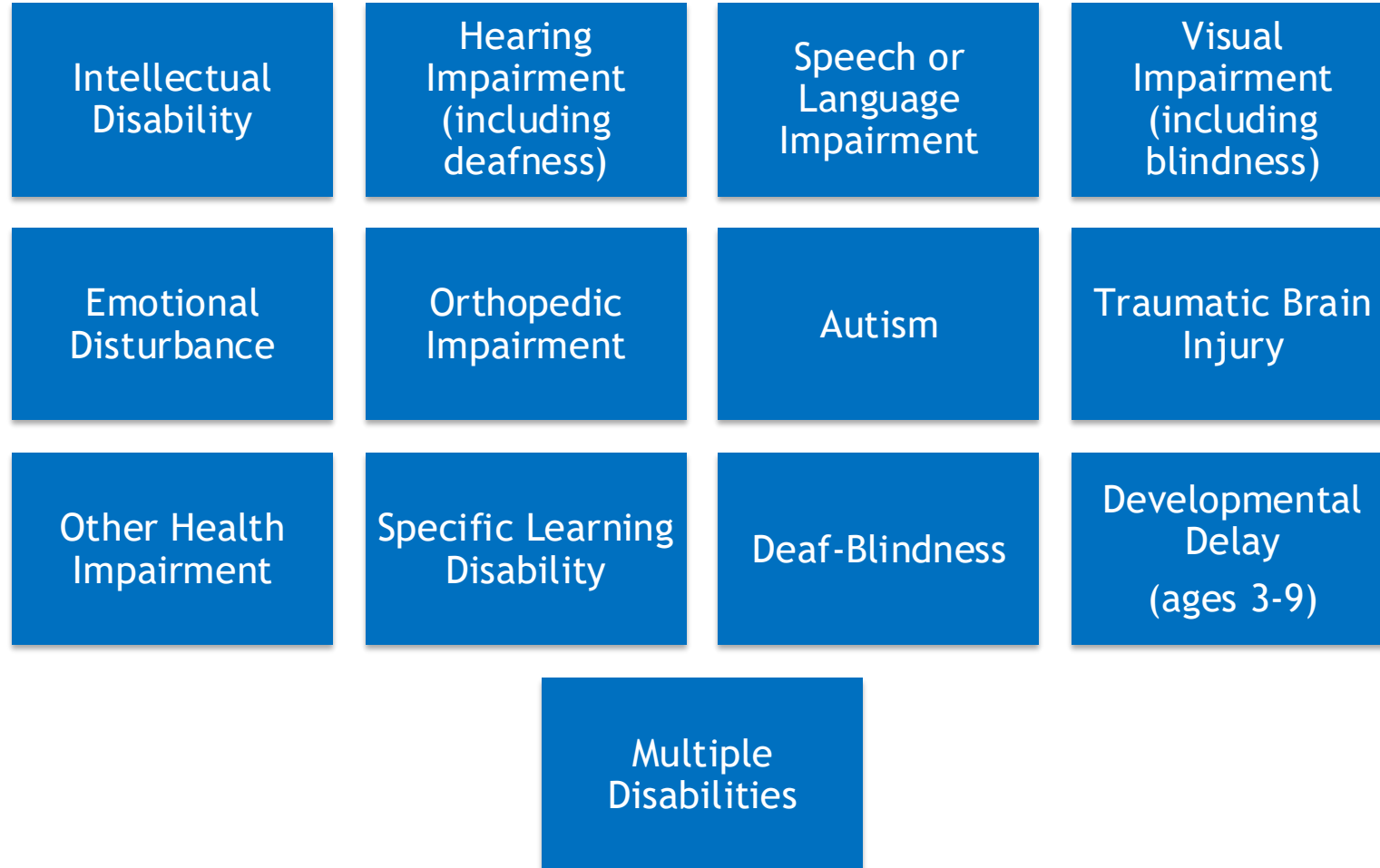
- ▶ The impact is significant enough that the student requires *specially designed instruction*. **Specially designed instruction** means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of a child the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that results from the child's disability.
- ▶ It requires a **multi-factored educational evaluation** by a school district.
- ▶ It must meet the criteria of one of the **13 disability categories** outlined in IDEA (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

A **medical diagnosis** is a medical condition that *impacts a person's health and/or development*. The diagnosis is made by a medical professional and must meet specific medical criteria.

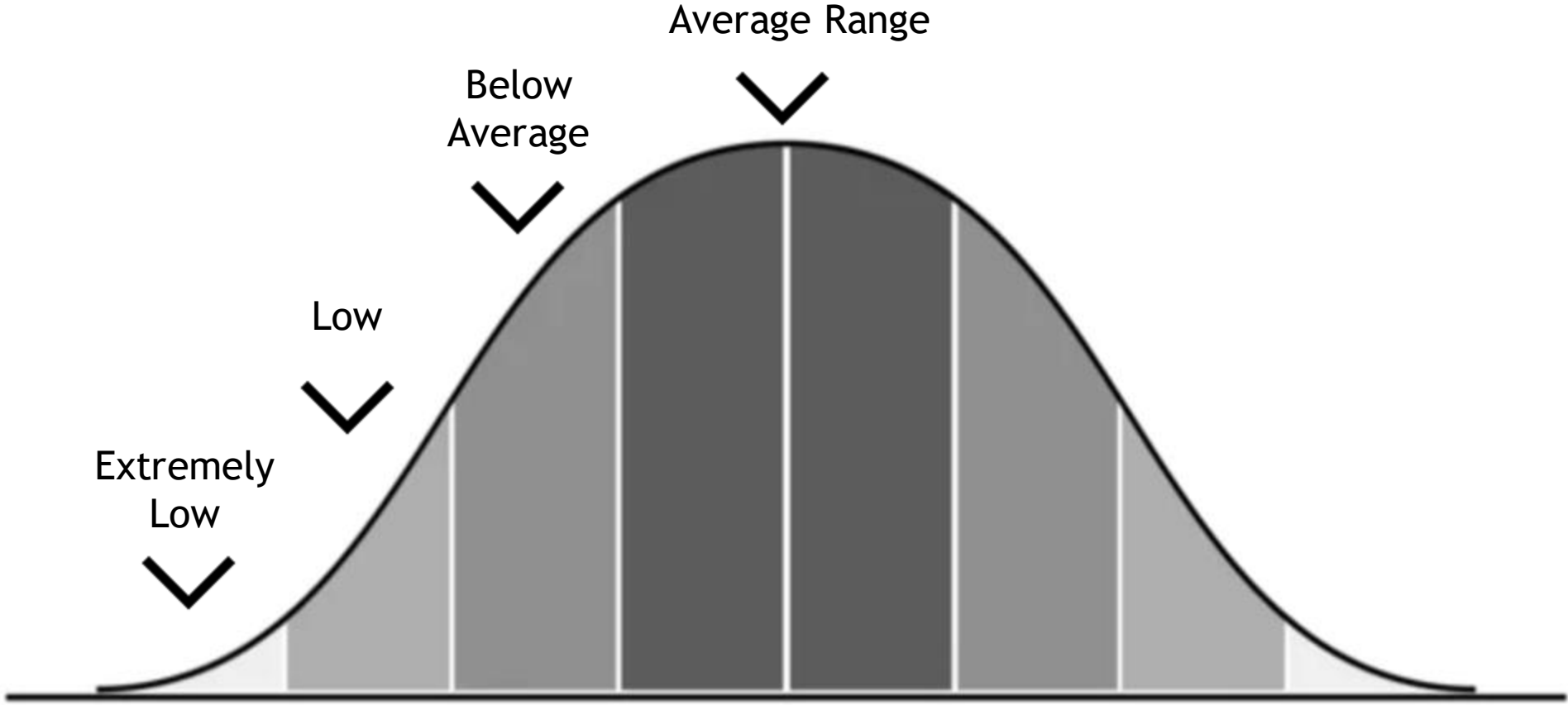
Key differences between a medical diagnosis and an educational disability

	Medical Diagnosis	Educational Disability
Scope	addresses the overall health and condition of the child	focuses on how the condition impacts learning
Purpose	for treatment and management of the condition	to provide the student with special education services or accommodations in school
Criteria	uses clinical guidelines (DSM-5, ICD)	uses IDEA's definitions and criteria
Eligibility for Services	A child can have a medical diagnosis but may not necessarily qualify for special education if the disability does not significantly impact their ability to learn in the school setting.	Conversely, a child might qualify for special education services through an educational disability even if they don't have a formal medical diagnosis.

Disability Categories



Bell Curve



Gathering Data about Your Student

What to Record	Types of Data to Collect
Date	Conversations with ANY School Staff (Specific Words Used)
Day of the Week	Emails/Phone Calls
Time of Day	Student Perceptions/Comments
Note the Individuals Involved (if any)	Student Behavior/Behavior Changes
Describe the Data	Other Observations/Important Information
Keep it Factual	Medical Information (as appropriate)
	Grade/Testing/Screening Information
	Interventions/Special Instruction
	Pertinent History

Special Education Evaluation Process

Step One: Requesting an Evaluation for Special Education Services

The request to evaluate can be made by either the district or the parent

How to request an evaluation:

- Request should be made in writing or email
- Request should be sent to the principal, special education coordinator, and teacher
- Request should include your concerns, any important data you've collected including medical diagnosis, and SPECIFIC language that you are requesting an evaluation for special education services

[Sample Letter Requesting Evaluation for Special Education](#)

Step Two: Determining Whether the District Suspects an Educational Disability

The District is required to respond to the request to evaluate within 30 calendar days

Information a district should consider:

- ▶ Significant Academic and Behavioral Concerns
- ▶ Medical Diagnosis
- ▶ Outside Evaluations
- ▶ Teacher Observations
- ▶ State and District Testing
- ▶ Progress Monitoring
- ▶ Interventions
- ▶ Parent Input
- ▶ Other Available Data

Common reasons a district might not suspect an educational disability:

- Not a significant difference between peers when reviewing available data
- Speech sounds/patterns may be developmentally appropriate
- Progress is being made in current MTSS interventions (Multi-Tiered System of Support) or there hasn't been enough time to determine if progress is being made in the current MTSS Interventions
- Significant amount of missed instruction/absences
- Student only needs 504 plan accommodations to access the general education curriculum
- Different performance/behavior at school versus home

What to do if the district declines to evaluate

1. Understand the district's decision
2. Review the data and the evidence
3. Continue to collect data
4. Know your rights

Parents have specific rights under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** if they disagree with the district's decision. These rights include:

- **Right to Dispute Resolution:** Parents can pursue an informal or formal resolution process if they believe the district's refusal is not justified.

Step Three: Evaluation Planning

The multidisciplinary team meets to develop an **evaluation plan**. This plan outlines which areas will be assessed (e.g., academics, behavior, communication, motor skills) and the specific methods and tools to be used

- ▶ The multidisciplinary team should consist of a group of qualified individuals, including the family. In general, it should include individuals who are knowledgeable about your child or the special education evaluation process
- ▶ [A planning form](#) will be completed detailing the different areas to be evaluated
- ▶ The team will determine which disability category is suspected
- ▶ The planning form will document the suspected areas of need, what type of information will be gathered, and what type of assessments will be given
- ▶ The parent or guardian **must sign a consent form**
- ▶ For an initial evaluation, the team has 60 calendar days to conduct the evaluation and hold the evaluation team meeting

Planning for Re-evaluations

Students that are already receiving special education services **must be re-evaluated at least every three years**

Purpose of Re-Evaluations

The purpose of re-evaluations is to:

- **Determine if the student continues to qualify** for special education services.
- **Assess the student's current needs** to ensure that their Individualized Education Program (IEP) remains appropriate.
- **Monitor the student's progress** and determine if any changes to services, supports, or goals are needed.

Parents have the right to request a new evaluation as long as it has been 12 months from the previous evaluation.

Step Four: Multi-Factored Evaluation

- ▶ After consent is given the district will conduct the evaluation based on the areas identified in the planning form.
- ▶ Each evaluator will score the assessments given and write their findings in a report.

Each evaluator's report will include:

- ▶ Any applicable background information, including outside testing
- ▶ The evaluator's observations of the student
- ▶ The results and interpretation of any assessments given as a part of the evaluation
- ▶ A description of educational needs
- ▶ The implications for instruction and progress monitoring

Step Five: Evaluation Team Meeting

For an initial evaluation, the team will meet within 60 days from the date of consent to discuss the results of the evaluation. Individuals qualified to interpret the results of the evaluation should be in attendance.

Review and Analysis of Data

Once all the assessments are completed, the multidisciplinary team **analyzes the data** to determine:

- Whether the student has a disability as defined by IDEA.
 - Whether the disability adversely affects the student's ability to access and make progress in the general education curriculum.
 - Whether the student requires **special education services** to address their needs.
- ▶ The team will review the report together and discuss the results.

Step Five: Eligibility Determination

During the **Evaluation Team Meeting**, the team, including the parents, will discuss the findings and determine if the student's needs meet the criteria for eligibility.

To qualify for special education services, the team must answer yes to the three questions listed in **section 4** of the evaluation team report:

1. The determining factor for the child's poor performance is not due to a lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math or the child's limited English proficiency. For the preschool-age child, the determining factor for the child's poor performance is not due to a lack of preschool pre-academics.
 2. The child meets the state criteria for having a disability (or continuing to have a disability) based on the data in this document.
 3. The child demonstrates an educational need that requires specially designed instruction.
- ▶ If the team answers "yes" to all three questions, the team would determine which disability category listed on the planning form best fits the student
 - ▶ If the team answers "no" to any of the questions, then the determination would be "no disability"

If the Team Determines There is “No Disability”

If the team determines that the results of the evaluation do not meet the definition of an educational disability, parents have several options to ensure their child’s needs are appropriately addressed. Here’s what parents can do:

- ▶ **Understand the District’s Decision**
- ▶ **Keep Open Communication**
 - ▶ **Request a Meeting**
 - ▶ **Collaborate with School Staff**
- ▶ **Explore 504 Plan Options**
- ▶ **Seek Support from External Resources**

What are My Rights if I Disagree?

After careful consideration, if you disagree with the results of the evaluation or if you disagree with the disability determination:

- ▶ Mark that you disagree on the signature page of the report
- ▶ The district may ask you to write a statement of disagreement

Parent Rights

If you disagree with the results of the evaluation:


- ▶ You have the right to request an independent education evaluation (IEE) by a
 - ▶ Third-Party
 - ▶ Not affiliated with the district
 - ▶ At the district's expense
- ▶ You have the right to ask for an Administrator Review within your District
- ▶ You have the right to pursue any of the dispute resolution options outlined in “A Guide to Parent Rights in Special Education”

Tips for the Evaluation Team Meeting

1. **Be Prepared**
2. **Understand the Evaluation Results**
3. **Know Your Rights**
4. **Ask Questions**
5. **Bring a Support Person**
6. **Focus on Your Child's Needs**
7. **Ensure Comprehensive Information is Considered**
8. **Advocate for Comprehensive Services**
9. **Remain Calm and Collaborative**
10. **Request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) if Needed**
11. **Document Everything**
12. **Follow Up**



Additional Resources

- [Special Education Roadmap](#)
 - [A Guide to Parent Rights in Special Education](#)
 - [District Parent Mentor](#)
 - [Montgomery County Regional Center/State Support Team 10](#)
 - [Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities \(OCECD\)](#)
 - [Early resolution information fact sheet](#)
 - [Ohio's Dispute Resolution Information Chart](#)
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Conclusions:

- ▶ A medical diagnosis and an educational disability have different criteria. An educational disability must meet the definitions as defined by IDEA
- ▶ Understanding the special education evaluation process allows you to fully participate in the special education evaluation process
- ▶ Knowing your rights empowers you to be a good advocate for your student



Questions?



Contact Information



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