

The Special Education Process

Written by Melissa Caswell

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Referral/Disposition of Referral: Any time someone suspects that a child may have an educational disability and that the child may require special education as a result of the disability, they should make a referral to the special education team.

Referrals can come from parents, the school, or the court system.

When a referral is received, the parents are given written notification of the referral and the special education team must meet within 15 days to have a disposition of referral meeting.

Parents are members of the special education team.

Other required team members are the classroom teacher, the grade level inclusion facilitator, and the special education coordinator.

Additional team members may be a speech pathologist, an occupational therapist, a guidance counselor, or the school psychologist.

The purpose of the disposition of referral meeting is to determine whether or not evaluations are necessary to determine if a disability may exist.

The team will review the concerns, discuss what interventions have been tried, and how effective they were.

If interventions have been tried and are determined to be successful, the team may decide not to pursue evaluations.

If interventions have been tried and growth is not being seen, then the team may decide to evaluate.

Evaluation: If the team determines that evaluations are needed, the team must determine what possible type of disability is suspected. Under New Hampshire state law there are 15 areas of identified disability (definitions are below):

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Autism

Acquired Brain Injury

Developmental Delay

Deaf-Blindness

Deafness

Emotional Disturbance

Hearing Impairment

Intellectual Disability

Multiple Disabilities

Orthopedic Impairment

Other Health Impairment

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Specific Learning Disability

Speech or Language Impairment

Traumatic Brain Injury

Visual Impairment

For each type of disability, there are specific types of evaluations that are required and there are required examiners for each type of evaluation.

Before evaluations can be conducted, written permission from the parent must be received. Once permission is received the team has 45 days to complete their evaluation.

Determination of Eligibility: The team will reconvene to review the evaluations and determine whether or not the student has an educational disability. This is a two-prong decision:

1. Does the child have a disability?
2. Does the child require specially designed instruction?

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- a. Is the child making adequate progress in school?

- b. Does the child require supports and services that go beyond what is available in the general education setting?

- c. Does the child require specially designed instruction in order to make effective progress in school?

If both prongs of the decision are determined to be yes, the child has an educational disability. If the child has a disability but does not require specially designed instruction, a referral to the 504 team may be determined appropriate.

Development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP): After a child has been determined eligible for special education, the team must meet within 30 days to develop an individualized education plan or IEP. The IEP will outline what the child needs and what services the school will provide in order to meet those needs. The parent is always a member of the team and their input is critical to developing an effective plan.

The team must meet annually to develop a new IEP.

Placement: After an IEP is agreed upon, the team meets to determine where best to implement the IEP. For most students, this means continued placement in their current classroom with supplemental services within the classroom or outside of the classroom for short periods of time. Like every other step in the special education process, this requires parental permission.

Like the IEP, placement is reviewed annually.