



Evaluation Nuts & Bolts: What Parents Need to Know

What is an evaluation?

An evaluation is the process for determining whether a child has a disability and requires special education and related services. It's the first step in developing an individual educational program that will help your child learn. [A full initial evaluation must be done before your child can be identified for special education or related services.] Students are re-evaluated at least once every three years after they are found eligible for special education services, unless the parents and SAU agree that an evaluation is not necessary.

Evaluation involves gathering information from a variety of sources about a child's functioning and development in all areas of suspected disability, including information provided by the parent. The evaluation may look at cognitive, behavioral, physical, and developmental factors, as well as other areas. All of this information is used to determine the child's educational needs.

Why have an evaluation?

A full and individual educational evaluation serves many important purposes:

1. **Identification.** It can identify a child who has delays or learning difficulties and may need special education and related services.
2. **Eligibility.** It can determine whether your child is a child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and who qualifies for special education and related services.
3. **Developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP).** It provides information that can help you and the school develop an appropriate IEP for your child.
4. **Instructional strategies.** It can help determine what strategies may be most effective in helping your child learn.
5. **Measuring progress.** The evaluation establishes a baseline for measuring your child's educational progress and creates a foundation for developing an appropriate educational program. The public agency must provide a copy of the evaluation report and the documentation of determination of eligibility to the parent. Even if the evaluation results show that your child does not need special education and related services, the information may still be used to help your child in a regular education program.¹

¹ Source: *Evaluation: What Does It Mean for Your Child?*, Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE), PACER Center, Inc., www.fape.org, (retrieved 1/2009)

Preparing Yourself

As a parent, you have valuable information you can share with professionals that will help them understand your child better and that can help them make the testing process more positive and productive for your child. Before going to a test session, take a few minutes to think about your child's development, strengths, weaknesses, interests, and your own thoughts and concerns for your child. Write them down and bring them with you to the test session. Some key questions to think about include:

- ★ Does your child take any medication or have any chronic medical problems?
- ★ At what age did your child learn to walk?
- ★ At what age did your child learn to talk?
- ★ How does your child get along with others?
- ★ Does your child dress, toilet, eat, etc. on his or her own?
- ★ What does your child enjoy doing?
- ★ What does your child consider a reward?
- ★ Do your child's moods fluctuate greatly?
- ★ How does your child learn best?

It is important that you understand what is being said and done during the testing process; if you are at ease about the evaluation your child will be at ease as well. Don't be embarrassed to ask the evaluator to explain terms you don't understand, the purpose of the test, or the next step in the process. Positive communication will help make the evaluation process successful.

Preparing Your Child

Children can be confused about why they are being evaluated. It is important for your child to understand that they are not being pulled out of class because they are "bad." They need to understand that testing will help the teacher make learning more positive for them. Talking with your child about meeting new people may help your child warm up to the evaluator, who is frequently someone new to them. Be sure to share information with the evaluator that may help make your child feel more comfortable.

It is important that your child be prepared for the evaluation by having a good night's sleep the night before the test is to be given, having a good breakfast on test day, and being as relaxed as possible. Your child will be more confident if he understands what is going to happen and knows what is expected of him during the evaluation. It is important to tell your child to be himself, and just do the best he can. Let your child know that the test is to help make school and learning a more positive experience.



P³ is a parent program partnership between the Learning Disabilities Association of Maine, Maine Parent Federation, and Southern Maine Parent Awareness.

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