

**Identification
of
Students with Disabilities
per IDEA:
From Request for Initial Evaluation
to Special Education Eligibility
(Parent Version: 2024)**

Questions regarding this process may be directed to:

Division of Student Support and Federal Programs
Exceptional Student Education (813) 273-7060
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Hillsborough County
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Preparing Students for Life

Identification of Students with Disabilities per IDEA: From Request for Initial Evaluation to Special Education Eligibility

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Overview

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS, also referred to as “District” within this manual) is responsible for educating all students, and identifying and supporting students with disabilities. HCPS utilizes Synergy, a cloud-based application that serves as a repository for student information. This student information system tracks students’ progression through the evaluation process when schools or parent(s)/legal guardian(s) suspect a disability and request a multidisciplinary team evaluation. As pertinent deadlines and timeframes are encountered for students being evaluated for special education services, communication is electronically delivered to all stakeholders. Also, the system can inform receiving schools when students transfer within HCPS prior to determining eligibility for special education services.

This manual highlights the procedures associated with the identification of students with disabilities from a request for an initial evaluation to the determination of special education program eligibility (i.e., Exceptional Student Education).

Requesting a Referral for a Multidisciplinary Evaluation Due to a Suspected Disability*

Diagram Steps: 1, 2, and 3

Timeline: 30-calendar days from request for evaluation to Child Study Team (CST) meeting

Per State Board Rule 6A-6.0331, the District must convene a multidisciplinary team within 30-calendar days (365 days per year, without exceptions) when:

- A parent/legal guardian/educational surrogate (subsequently referred to as “parent” within this manual) requests consideration for an initial multidisciplinary evaluation to consider special education (orally or in writing), unless the parent and school agree otherwise in writing, or
- A school-based team suspects a disability based on response to intervention (RtI) data.

The multidisciplinary team is referred to as the Child Study Team (CST), and participants include the parents, their guests, specific school/district personnel, and the student (when appropriate). During the CST meeting, participants review information relevant to suspected disability, including: the concerns of the parent/legal guardian and the teacher, available progress monitoring data and/or data regarding interventions delivered in the general education environment, as well as formative/summative/universal screening data. When appropriate, medical and health data will also be reviewed. (Given the 30-day window to convene the team, school personnel should ensure that vision and hearing screenings are appropriately addressed.) The CST makes recommendations based on the review of the aforementioned data and this information should be summarized on a *Conference Summary* form.

The *Part B Notice of Procedural Safeguards* must be provided to the parent during the CST meeting. The parent will be asked to provide informed written consent for the evaluation and responsibilities for the pending evaluation will be discussed and documented. Should the parent withdraw his/her request for an initial ESE evaluation, this should be documented on the *Conference Summary* as well.

When the CST has convened due to the parent’s request for an initial evaluation and that request is denied, then the Part B Notice of Procedural Safeguards must be provided to the parent at the CST meeting. The parent must also be provided with *Prior Written Notice: Refusal to Take a Specific Action*, which explains why the District is refusing to conduct the evaluation.

*This process also applies to children enrolled in a Home Education program or private school.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team Report: Evaluation

Diagram Step: 4

Timeline: 60-calendar days for all evaluation(s) needed for determination of eligibility/ineligibility

Timeline Exceptions:

- Extension by mutual consent of parent and District
- Student absences

Relevant Evaluation Reports, as Applicable:

- Audiological
- Assistive technology
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Functional evaluation for occupational therapy
- Functional evaluation for physical therapy
- Functional vision evaluation/media assessment
- Medical eye examination
- Psychoeducational
- Social Developmental History
- Speech and/or language
- Additional reports that are provided by the parent/legal guardian

The initial multidisciplinary evaluation must be conducted within 60-calendar days, after the District's receipt of written parental consent. Days not counted as part of the 60-calendar days include: all school holidays, winter and spring break days, and summer vacation days. Also, when a student is absent for more than 8 days within the 60-calendar-day period, the student's absences in excess of the 8 days shall not be counted toward the 60-calendar-day deadline. When the CST has convened at the request of the parent and supplemental and/or intensive interventions have not been initiated (or are in progress), then interventions will be conducted concurrently with the evaluation timeline.

Extensions by mutual consent: The parent and District, by mutual written agreement, may extend the 60-calendar day requirement by no more than 30-calendar days. The written agreement must be secured before the 45th-calendar day, but after the formal testing has begun and it was determined that other evaluators are needed to complete the required full and individual evaluation.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team Report: Special Education Eligibility Staffing

Diagram Steps: 5 – 8

Timeline: 15-school days for steps 5 – 7

Within 15-school days (excluding student holidays) of the completion of the initial multidisciplinary evaluation, a meeting date is scheduled to determine if the student meets eligibility criteria for an ESE disability category (or categories). Within this timeframe, ESE school-based and district staffing personnel compile and review all evaluation data. This is completed to ensure that all required components are present to address ESE areas of eligibility, per requirements detailed in: Florida Statutes, State Board of Education Rules, and the District's *Policies and Procedures for the Provision of Specially Designed Instruction and Related Services for Exceptional Students*.

Given a provision of ten days of written notice, parents are invited and encouraged to attend the agreed upon meeting (i.e., eligibility staffing). In advance of the eligibility staffing, a copy of evaluation report(s) generated by district personnel are provided to the parents—student is determined ineligible for an ESE

program, the parent is provided informed written notice of ineligibility via the *Informed Notice of Eligibility/Consent for Initial Placement*.

Development of the Individual Education Plan

Diagram Step: 9

Timeline: 30-calendar days

If a student is determined to be eligible for an ESE disability category, an IEP is developed by a team of relevant professionals and the parent. The parent must be invited and encouraged to attend the IEP meeting, using the appropriate meeting notice. The IEP meeting may occur immediately following the eligibility staffing meeting, but must be held within 30 days of eligibility determination.

The members of the IEP team include:

- Parent(s)/Legal Guardian(s)/Educational Surrogate
- At least one regular education teacher if the student is/may be participating in the general education environment
- At least one special education teacher/therapist of the student
- A local education agency representative of the District
- An individual who can interpret instructional implications of evaluation results
- At the discretion of the parent, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student
- The student, when appropriate

Each IEP team member will contribute their experience, knowledge, and training to recommend and secure appropriate resources to meet the needs of the student. The IEP team will collectively make appropriate educational decisions in the best interest of the student.

Upon completion of the IEP, the parent will be asked to give written informed consent for specially designed instruction and related services as outlined in the IEP. A copy of the IEP and any relevant documents are provided to the parent upon conclusion of the meeting.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Please refer to *HCPS Policy 2460 – Exceptional Student Education* (Appendix D) for terms frequently used within this manual and during the Child Find. Additionally, the following terms are frequently referenced:

Child Study Team (CST): A team of school-based personnel and parent(s), who formally review all the information available about the child’s learning needs, strengths, challenges, and interests. The team uses a problem-solving process to review data and determine if a referral for a multidisciplinary team evaluation is appropriate.

Consent: The parent/guardian must give informed consent, in writing, prior to the District conducting any of the following: an initial evaluation, before the initial provision of services, for reevaluations, for administration of the alternate assessment and state standards access points curriculum, and for placing a student in an Exceptional Student Education center. Consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any time. Parental consent is not required before reviewing existing data or administering a test or other evaluation that is administered to all students.

Eligibility Staffing Committee: A team of professionals and parent(s) responsible for reviewing evaluation results to determine if the child meets requirements for eligibility under one of the State Board Rules and if there is evidence for the need of special education and related services.

Evaluators: Specially trained individuals who can directly and indirectly assess students (including gathering of information from parents, teachers, other educators, and other relevant stakeholders) for the purpose providing multiple sources of information to an eligibility staffing committee. Evaluators can include, but are not limited to: general education teachers, special education teachers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, school social workers, and speech/language pathologists.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE): Exceptional Student Education is specially designed instruction and related services that are provided to students with disabilities and students who are identified as gifted.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): An educational entitlement that is guaranteed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 (IDEA). It ensures that children with disabilities receive the same educational opportunities as children without disabilities. FAPE is achieved through special services outlined in an IEP.

Individual Education Plan (IEP): A written plan which includes a description of the student’s current academic and/or functional levels of performance, a statement of goals and objectives or benchmarks (for students who take the alternate assessment or any student at the discretion of the IEP team) for the student, and a statement of the specially designed instruction and related services, including supplemental aides and services, to be provided. The plans are designed to meet the individual needs of the student and are developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with Rule 6A-6.03028, F.A.C. Parents are partners with schools and district personnel in developing, reviewing, and revising the IEP.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A law that ensures special education and related services are provided to students with disabilities throughout the nation.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET): A group of professional examiners, responsible for conducting a comprehensive evaluation to determine whether a child has a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and is eligible to receive special education and related services because of that disability. The group of examiners may include physicians, school psychologists, psychologists, speech/ language pathologists, teachers, audiologists, and school social workers who are qualified in the professional's field as evidenced by a valid license or certificate to practice such a profession in Florida. The evaluation requires the use of a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child. This information, which includes information provided by the parent, may assist in determining:

1. whether the child is a child with a disability
2. the content of the child's IEP to enable the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum.

Procedural Safeguards: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), the Federal law providing protections for children with disabilities, requires schools to provide parents of a child with a disability with a notice containing a full explanation of the procedural safeguards available under Part B of the IDEA and the U.S. Department of Education Federal Regulations. A copy of this notice (Part B Notice of Procedural Safeguards for Parents of Students with Disabilities) must be given to parents at least one time per school year, and a copy also must be given to parents: (1) upon initial referral for evaluation or upon parent request for an evaluation; (2) in accordance with the discipline procedures when a change in placement occurs; (3) upon receipt of the first State complaint in a school year; (4) upon receipt of the first request for a due process hearing in a school year; (5) upon the school district superintendent's recommendation to the commissioner of education that an extraordinary exemption for a given state assessment administration window be granted or denied; and (6) upon parent request to receive a copy.

Synergy: A cloud-based application product of Edupoint that serves as a repository for student information.

Appendix B: Exceptional Student Education Disability Categories

IDEA lists 13 different disability categories under which 3- through 21-year-olds may be eligible for services. The disability categories listed in IDEA are:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH)
Developmental Delay (DD)
Dual-Sensory Impairment (DSI)
Emotional Behavioral Disability (E/BD)
Hospital Homebound (H/H)
Intellectual Disability (InD)
Language Impairment (LI)
Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
Other Health Impairment (OHI)
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
Speech Impairment (SI)
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
Visual Impairment (VI)

Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What role does the parent/legal guardian have in the special education identification process?

Parents/Legal guardians are integral members of the teams involved in the special education identification process. They are welcome to attend and bring along a guest to participate in meetings. This would apply to CST meetings, discussion of evaluation results with practitioners, the eligibility staffing, and development of the Individual Education Plan goals and objectives (for students found eligible to receive special education). Parents are provided procedural safeguards and rights regarding the process and are asked to provide consent during various stages of the process (i.e., evaluation, IEP development, placement).

2. Who should the parent/legal guardian contact regarding their child's status during the process?

Parents should contact the principal or assistant principal of the school for any questions or an update regarding their child's status in the process. They will refer them to the site-appointed CST Chair or the ESE case manager.

3. How will the District track a student who transfers from one school to another?

The Synergy Student Information System (SIS) stores student information in a database table. When a student transfers to another school, electronic records within SIS are immediately accessible to the receiving school. Additionally, hard copies of historical records associated with the student are transferred to the receiving school.

Educational professionals assigned to the student's team are notified via specific icons and other visual prompts regarding the student's status in the process of being identified as having a disability.

4. How are relevant school employees alerted when all evaluations have been completed and a staffing is needed to consider special education eligibility?

The school ESE specialist/lead/contact (S/L/C) notifies the staffing specialist. From this point, the staffing specialist previews all required components to consider special education eligibility. An invitation for the parent to participate in the staffing should follow.

Appendix D: Resources

Hillsborough County Public Schools

HCPS Policy 2460 – Exceptional Student Education

[Policy Details - Hillsborough County Public Schools \(hillsboroughschools.org\)](https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/policymanual/detail/421)

<https://web.hillsboroughschools.org/policymanual/detail/421>

HCPS Exceptional Student Education

[Exceptional Student Education \(Special Education\) / Overview \(hillsboroughschools.org\)](https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/ese)

<https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/ese>

HCPS Exceptional Student Education Sharepoint

(Understanding Compliance Issues Manual and related forms)

Hillsborough Staff Hub: District Offices > ESE: ESE Staffing & Compliance >Resources Manuals & Guides

[ESE Staffing & Compliance - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com)

HCPS Professional Development System

[Course Catalog | Hillsborough County Public Schools \(ascriptica.com\)](https://ascriptica.com)

Florida Department of Education

Exceptional Student Education

[Exceptional Student Education \(fldoe.org\)](https://fldoe.org)

<https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/>

Florida Rule 6A-6.0331 - General Education Intervention Procedures, Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Reevaluation and the Provision of Exceptional Student Education Services

[6A-6.0331 : General Education Intervention Procedures, Evaluation, Determination of Eligibility, Reevaluation and the Provision of Exceptional Student Education Services - Florida Administrative Rules, Law, Code, Register - FAC, FAR, eRulemaking \(flrules.org\)](https://www.flrules.org)

<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?ID=6A-6.0331>

Part B Procedural Safeguards Notice: Florida

[Part B Procedural Safeguards Notice: Florida \(fldoe.org\)](https://fldoe.org)

<https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070135-procedural.pdf>

Florida Rule 6A-6.03028 – Provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Development of Individual Educational Plans for Students with Disabilities

[6A-6.03028 : Provision of Free Appropriate Public Education \(FAPE\) and Development of Individual Educational Plans for Students with Disabilities - Florida Administrative Rules, Law, Code, Register - FAC, FAR, eRulemaking \(flrules.org\)](https://www.flrules.org)

<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?ID=6A-6.03028>

Florida Department of Education Policies and Procedures

[GSW | Policies and Procedures - Districts \(beessgsw.org\)](https://beessgsw.org)

U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Education Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
[Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/)
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>