

WHAT IS EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

Parents Are Part of the Team!

School staff can answer parents' questions about ESE, about how parents can participate, and about parents' rights and responsibilities. Other sources of information include the school principal and the ESE administrator in the local school district office.

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The rights of parents of students with disabilities are called their "procedural safeguards."

Parents receive a written summary of their procedural safeguards when they are asked to give their consent for their child to be individually evaluated.

In Florida, children who have special learning needs because of a disability are called exceptional students. The special help they are given at school is called **exceptional student education (ESE)**. The purpose of ESE is to help each child with a disability to progress in school and prepare for life after school. Exceptional student education services may include special teaching methods and materials. They may also include technology devices, therapy, special transportation, or other supports. There is no charge for these special services.

Decisions about a child's ESE services are made by a team. The child's parents are part of this team. Below is a basic explanation of the ESE process. This process is based on the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

REFERRAL FOR INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION

A **referral** is a request for an individual evaluation of a child who is suspected of needing ESE services. Some children are referred because they have an obvious disability or because they do not do well on group tests such as hearing or vision screenings. However, when a child is having difficulty in school, several kinds of help are usually tried *before* a referral for evaluation is made. For example, the school's child study team may suggest specific teaching or behavior management methods to the teacher. These are called **interventions**. If the interventions do not solve the problem, the parent or the school staff will then refer the child for an evaluation.

INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION

An **individual evaluation** is a way of collecting information about a child's learning needs, strengths, problems, and interests. The evaluation may include tests, observations, interviews, or other ways of gathering information. In order for a child to be individually evaluated, the parent or guardian must give written consent.

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION

After the evaluation, the school holds a meeting called an **eligibility staffing**. The parents and the rest of the team at the eligibility staffing discuss the information collected about the child. Then the team determines whether the child is eligible for ESE services. To receive ESE services, the child must meet the criteria listed in Florida's State Board of Education Rules.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CHILD IS ELIGIBLE?

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST IEP

If the child is eligible for ESE services, the next step is to hold a meeting to write an **individual educational plan (IEP)**. The child's parents are invited to this meeting because they are part of the IEP team. The IEP team decides which special services and supports the child needs in order to make progress and achieve his or her annual goals.

The IEP team also decides what kind of classes the child will receive services in. Most children with disabilities spend most of their school day in general education classrooms. Some children leave the general education classroom for part of the day to receive services in an ESE resource class. A few children spend all day in a special class or in a special school.

CONSENT FOR PLACEMENT & SERVICES BEGIN

After the **first** IEP has been written, the parent is asked to give written consent for the child to receive ESE services. A child cannot receive ESE services for the first time until the IEP is written and the parent has given **consent for placement**.

YEARLY DEVELOPMENT OF NEW IEP

At least once every 12 months, the IEP team meets to talk about the child's progress and to develop a new IEP. Of course, the child's needs may change at any time, so the parent, the teacher, or other team members may ask for an IEP meeting at any time. The child's services can only be changed during an IEP meeting.

THREE-YEAR REEVALUATION

The school **reevaluates** the child at least every three years to find out if the child still needs ESE services and how the child's needs have changed.

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*Note: Programs for **gifted** students are also part of ESE. However, the process for serving gifted students is not the same as the process described above. For more information, contact the school district's ESE administrator.*

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Florida Department
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