
Chapter 4 — Evaluation

Hamden Public Schools uses procedures to ensure that proper identification of students with disabilities occurs through the implementation of sound evaluative practices. Evaluation in this context means the procedures that the District uses to determine whether a student has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education services that the student needs. A full and individual initial evaluation is conducted to determine if the student is a student with a disability and to determine the student's educational needs before any action is taken with respect to the initial placement of a student with disabilities in a special education program. A reevaluation is conducted if conditions warrant it, or if a student's parent or teacher requests a reevaluation, but at least once every 3 years unless the parent and our District agree that it is unnecessary. In addition, a reevaluation will not be conducted more frequently than once a year unless the parent and our District agree otherwise.

❖ Process

1. Early Intervention Strategies

Before school personnel refer a student to a Planning and Placement Team, alternative strategies and programs in regular education are explored and, where appropriate, implemented. See Student Identification, for more detailed information on locating students who may have a disability and need special education.

2. Referral to Determine Eligibility for Special Education and Related Services [ED 621]

If these strategies are not successful or if the parents make a written request for an evaluation, a student is referred to determine eligibility for special education and related services. A District standard referral form [ED 621] is used to document the referral. This form is available to parents and school personnel in each of the schools and at the Special Education Department Office. Parents receive notice of the referral within five school days of the date of the referral, regardless of who makes the referral.

3. Initial Evaluation

A Planning and Placement Team meeting is scheduled to discuss the referral. Parents receive written notification of the PPT five school days prior to the meeting. The PPT may decide an evaluation is not needed and the regular education program and services are appropriate. If the PPT decides to conduct an evaluation, the PPT, which includes the parent, designs the evaluation (*See Evaluation Study for Determination of Eligibility and Placement*). Before our District provides initial special education and related services, a full and individual initial evaluation is conducted to determine if the student is a student with a disability and to determine the education needs of the student. Parents must sign a written consent for the evaluation. See Chapter 3 for evaluation notice and consent requirements.

After the evaluation is completed, the Planning and Placement Team of qualified professionals and the parent of the student make the determination of whether the student is a student with a disability. See Chapter 1 for further details of student identification. A copy of the evaluation report and documentation of eligibility is given to the parent. Development of the IEP for a student is based upon the diagnostic findings of the evaluation study. Implementation of an IEP based upon an initial referral is not to exceed 45 school days from the date of referral or 60 school days for students placed in a private school, exclusive of the time necessary to get parent consent. *(See Chapter 6 for further details regarding Individualized Education Programs.)*

4. Interpretation of Evaluative Data in Making Educational Decisions

In interpreting evaluation data for the purpose of determining if a student has a disability and what the educational needs of the student are, the District uses information from a variety of sources, including aptitude and achievement tests, parent input, teacher recommendations, physical condition, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior. The District ensures that information obtained from all of these sources is documented and carefully considered. An IEP is developed if a determination is made after reviewing the information that a student has a disability and he/she requires special education and related services. A student is not determined to be a student with a disability if the determining factor for such decision is limited English proficiency or lack of instruction in reading or math.

5. Reevaluation

The IEP of each student with a disability is reviewed in our District periodically, but at least annually. A reevaluation of each student with a disability is conducted at least once every three years (unless the parent and our District agree that it is unnecessary), or if a student's parent or teacher requests a reevaluation (although a reevaluation will not be conducted more frequently than once a year unless the parent and our District agree otherwise). Parents must sign consent for reevaluation unless our District can document that we have taken reasonable measures to obtain parental consent and the parent (or eligible student) has failed to respond (see Chapter 3, page 4). See Chapter 3 for reevaluation notice requirements and the appendix for the consent form.

6. Evaluation Prior to Termination of Special Education Eligibility

The District evaluates a student with a disability before determining that the student is no longer a student with a disability. An evaluation before the termination of a student's eligibility for special education and related services is not required if the student graduates with a regular high school diploma or exceeds the age of eligibility for FAPE under state law.

❖ Summary of Performance

For a student whose eligibility for special education and related services terminates due to graduation with a regular diploma or due to exceeding the age eligibility for FAPE under state law, our District will provide the student with a summary of the student's academic achievement and functional performance [ED 635], which shall include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his or her postsecondary goals.

❖ **Evaluation Study for Determination of Eligibility and Placement**

An evaluation study on a student in Hamden includes reports concerning educational progress, structured observation, and such psychological, medical, developmental and social evaluations as may be appropriate to determine the nature and scope of the student's exceptionality.

The evaluation study may include information concerning the student's physical condition, socio-cultural background and adaptive behavior in home and school. The evaluation report documents the sources of all information. If an assessment is not conducted under standard conditions, a description of the extent to which it varies from standard conditions is included in the evaluation report.

In evaluating each student with a disability, our District's evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the student's special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the student's disability category. A student is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.

No single procedure is used as the sole criterion to determine whether a student has a disability and to design an appropriate educational program for the student. Results of standardized or local tests of ability, aptitude, affect, achievement and aspiration are not exclusively used as the basis for determining whether a student is a student with a disability within our District. An evaluation study shall document and carefully consider the sources of all information.

Evaluative Data for Initial Evaluation or Reevaluation

As part of an initial evaluation and as part of any reevaluation, the PPT (which develops, reviews or revises the student's IEP) and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, review existing evaluation data, including:

- Information, and evaluations conducted by the district and/or provided by the parents of the student;
- current classroom-based, local, or State assessments, and classroom-based observations; and
- observations by teacher and related services providers.

If the team is unable to make a determination using existing information, the team may identify any additional data that maybe needed including tests and other evaluation materials to determine the following:

- Whether the student has a particular category of disability and the educational needs of the child;
- In the case of reevaluation, whether the student continues to have such a disability and such educational needs;
- The present levels of academic achievement and related developmental needs of the student;
- Whether the student needs special education and related services;
- In the case of a reevaluation of a student, whether the student continues to need special education and related services; and

- Whether any additions or modifications to the special education and related services are needed to enable the student to:
 - Meet the measurable annual goals set out in the IEP; and
 - Participate, as appropriate, in the general education curriculum.

Notice and consent for initial evaluation and reevaluation will be completed.

When conducting a reevaluation, if no additional data is needed to determine whether the student continues to be a student with a disability, the District notifies the student's parents of this determination and the reasons for it. The District also notifies the parents of their right to request an assessment to determine whether the student continues to be a student with a disability and to determine the child's educational needs. The District is not required to conduct an assessment unless requested by the student's parents.

Evaluations of students with disabilities who transfer from one school district to another school district in the same academic year are coordinated with such student's prior and subsequent schools, as necessary and as expeditiously as possible, to ensure prompt completion of full evaluations.

❖ **Evaluation Tools and Measurements**

Tests, evaluation materials, procedures and techniques used for the purpose of evaluation are chosen carefully to ensure accurate results. They are selected and administered so as not to discriminate on a racial or cultural basis. They are used to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information including: information provided by the parent, and information related to enabling the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum. For a preschool student, the District looks at information that will enable the student to participate in appropriate activities. This information will help the PPT determine whether a student has a disability as well as the content of the student's IEP.

The evaluation tools the District uses are administered according to instructions provided by the producers/publishers and have been validated for the specific purpose for which they are used. They are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel who are appropriately certified and or licensed. The District ensures that they are technically sound instruments that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors.

The evaluation tools and measurements that the District uses include those tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely those that are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient. These assessment measures provide relevant information that directly assists persons in determining the educational needs of the student. Tests and measurements that the District uses are selected and administered to ensure that the test results accurately reflect the student's aptitude or achievement level or whatever factors the test purports to measure, rather than reflecting the student's impaired sensory, manual or speaking skills.

Language Issues in Evaluation

Assessments, evaluation material, procedures and techniques used for evaluation are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis. They are provided and administered in the student's native language and form most likely to yield accurate information on what the student knows and can do academically, developmentally and functionally unless it is not feasible to do so. If a student is dominant in a language other than English, the evaluation study also includes systematic teacher observation of the specific areas of concern. Detailed information about the student's performance at home and in the community and any prescriptive or diagnostic teaching that have taken place is included.

The District uses a language dominance proficiency assessment prior to an evaluation when appropriate. Materials and procedures used to assess a student with limited English proficiency are selected and administered to ensure that they measure the extent to which the student has a disability and needs special education rather than measuring the student's English language skills.

Evaluation for Learning Disabilities

The determination of whether a student suspected of having a specific learning disability is a student with a disability must be made by a PPT which includes the student's parents and qualified professionals including, but not limited to:

- the student's regular teacher [or if the student does not have a regular teacher, a regular classroom teacher, a regular classroom teacher qualified to teach a student of her or his age, or for a student of younger than school age, an individual qualified by the state educational agency to teach a student of her or his age]; and
- at least one person qualified to conduct an individual diagnostic examination such as a school psychologist, speech-language pathologist or remedial reading teacher.

Determination of a Learning Disability

Specific Learning Disability ("SLD") means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written.

A PPT may determine that a student has a specific learning disability *if*:

1. The student does not achieve adequately for his or her age, or to meet grade level standards in one or more of the following areas (when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or grade level standards):
 - oral expression
 - listening comprehension
 - written expression
 - basic reading skills
 - reading fluency skills
 - reading comprehension
 - mathematics calculation
 - mathematics problem solving

and,

2. The student does not make sufficient progress to meet age or grade level standards in one or more of the areas identified in number 1, above, when using a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; or
3. The student exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, grade level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the team to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments.

In addition, the PPT may not identify a student as having a specific learning disability if the suspected disability is primarily the result of:

- a visual, hearing or motor disability;
- intellectual disability;
- emotional disturbance;
- environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage;
- limited English proficiency; and
- lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math.

To ensure that underachievement in a child suspected of having a SLD is not due to a lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math, the team must also consider, as part of the evaluation:

- Data that demonstrates that prior to, or as a part of the referral process, the student was provided appropriate, research-based instruction in regular education settings, including that the instruction was delivered by qualified personnel; and
- Data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction, which was provided to the student's parents.

In determining whether a child has an SLD, our district may use a discrepancy model (i.e., discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement) or a Response to Intervention model which determines the existence of a learning disability based upon the progress a student makes over an appropriate period of time when provided with high-quality instruction/intervention and frequent monitoring of progress. Either model is permissible.

No matter which method our district uses to identify a child with SLD (response to scientific, research based instruction, or discrepancy model of patterns of strengths and weaknesses) we will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the student that will also include an observation of the student's academic performance in the regular classroom setting by at least one team member other than the student's regular education teacher. In the case of a student of less than school age or out of school, a team member will observe the student in an environment appropriate for a student of that age.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report [ED 629]

For a student suspected of having a specific learning disability, the documentation of the PPT's determination of eligibility (*See Chapter 4 Appendix*) must include a statement of:

- whether the student has a specific learning disability;
- the basis for making the determination;
- the relevant behavior noted during the observation of the student;
- the relationship of that behavior to the student's academic functioning;
- whether the student does not achieve adequately or make sufficient progress to meet age or grade level standards;
- whether there are patterns of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement or both, relative to age, grade-level standards, or intellectual development in one or more of the areas listed under "*Determination of a Learning Disability*);
- the instructional strategies used and the student-centered data collected if a response to scientific, research-based intervention process was implemented;
- the determination of the group concerning the effects of a visual, hearing, or motor disability; intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or limited English proficiency on the child's achievement level; and
- educationally relevant medical findings, if any;
- If the child has participated in a process that assesses the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention:
 - The instructional strategies used and the student-centered data collected; and
 - The documentation that the child's parents were notified about: (1) the State's policies regarding the amount and nature of student performance data that would be collected and the general education services that would be provided; (2) strategies for increasing the child's rate of learning; and (3) the parents' right to request an evaluation.

Each team member participating in the determination of eligibility of a student suspected of having a learning disability certifies in writing whether the report reflects her or his conclusion. If it does not, the team member will submit a separate statement presenting his or her conclusions.

❖ Independent Educational Evaluation

Parents may request an independent educational evaluation at district expense if the parent disagrees with an evaluation that was completed or obtained by our District. The parent is entitled to request only one IEE at district expense each time the District conducts an evaluation with which the parent disagrees.

If a parent requests an independent educational evaluation at Hamden's expense, our District will, without unnecessary delay, either --

- File a due process complaint to request a hearing to show that the District's evaluation is appropriate; or
- Ensure that an independent educational evaluation is provided at District expense, unless the agency demonstrates in a hearing that the evaluation obtained by the parent did not meet agency criteria.

When an independent education evaluation is at District expense, the criteria under which the evaluation is obtained, including the location of the evaluation and the qualifications of the examiner must be the same as the criteria that our District uses when the District initiates an evaluation. This is done to the extent that the criteria are consistent with the parent's right to an independent educational evaluation and that the District may not impose additional conditions or timelines to those that the District uses.

If the parent obtains an independent educational evaluation at private expense, our District in any decision made with respect to the provision of FAPE to the student will consider the results of the evaluation. The results of an independent educational evaluation obtained by the parent at private expense may be presented as evidence at a hearing under the provisions of IDEA.

Trial Placement for Diagnostic Purposes

The purpose of such placements is to assess the needs of a student for whom special education and related services may be necessary, but for whom the evaluation study is either inconclusive or the data insufficient to determine the student's IEP. A diagnostic placement is a structured program of not more than eight weeks duration.

The following steps are implemented in our District when the District has a student in a diagnostic placement:

1. The PPT specifies, in writing, the diagnostic goals and objectives, as well as the types and amounts of services needed to conduct the program to determine more conclusively the student's needs.
2. The PPT meets at least once every two weeks with personnel working with the student to discuss the student's progress and to revise, where necessary, the services being provided.
3. The PPT decides whether the student's time is divided between the diagnostic program and another program, or the student may be placed in the diagnostic program full time.
4. A diagnostic program shall be terminated as soon as the student's needs have been determined, but in any event within eight weeks.
5. Five school days before the end of the diagnostic program, the PPT will re-convene and, if required, write the student's IEP based on the findings made during the diagnostic placement as well as other evaluative information regarding the student.