



WAUNAKEE
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT



PARENT/GUARDIAN GUIDE:

GETTING HELP FOR YOUR CHILD AT SCHOOL

Waunakee Community School District
www.waunakee.k12.wi.us

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Table of Contents

- 3** Introduction
- 4** What should I do when I have a concern about my child?
Should I refer my child for a special education evaluation?
What if my child's doctor has a concern about development or delays in development?
- 5** Who should I contact if my child attends a private school in the Waunakee area?
What should I do if I have a concern about my child who is 3 or 4 years old and not in school yet?
What is the process if I want to make a referral for a special education evaluation for my child?
- 6** What disability areas are considered as part of the special education evaluation process?
- 7** What criteria is used to determine if my child has a disability?
What are the components of an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?
- 8** How often is the IEP reviewed by the team?
Preparing for Your Child's IEP Meeting
- 9** How often will the IEP team reevaluate my child?
What happens if I disagree with an IEP team decision?
When should my child exit special education?
- 10** What is the difference between an IEP and a Section 504 Plan?
- 11** Glossary

Introduction

Welcome to the *Parent/Guardian Guide: Getting Help for Your Child at School*. As parents/guardians/caregivers, you play a crucial role in your child's education, and the District works in partnership with you to support your child in both academics and social emotional learning. Together, we work as a team to ensure the best outcomes for your child. We understand that the world of education can be filled with acronyms and jargon, so we have included a glossary at the end of this guide for your reference.

The District has a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for students. This means that students are able to receive the support they need as part of their daily educational programming. The District provides three Tiers of support in both academics and social emotional learning. Tier 1 is the general education curriculum that all students can access. Tier 2 supports are provided for students who may have academic or social emotional challenges that need some additional intervention or support. Tier 3 supports are for students who need additional, more intensive support in order to be successful. It is important to note that Tier 3 is not synonymous with special education. MTSS does not function as a step ladder to special education. If a student is making progress in a Tier 3 intervention, he/she may continue in that intervention.

The District uses both academic and social emotional learning data to determine whether or not a child needs additional support. Parents/guardians/caregivers are always notified if their child is being recommended to work in a small intervention group for academics or social emotional learning.

If you have academic or social emotional concerns about your child, reach out to your child's teacher and ask if your child has been identified for an intervention group. If he/she has not been identified as needing additional support, it could mean that your child has scored in the average range on district assessments and therefore does not qualify to be part of an intervention group.



WAUNAKEE
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

What should I do when I have a concern about my child?

When you have a concern about your child at school, the first step is to reach out to your child's teacher. They can provide insights into your child's daily experiences and may be able to offer immediate support or guidance. If your concern persists or requires further attention, you can contact the building principal, who can help you connect with the appropriate school staff member. Student concerns related to academics, behavior and social emotional functioning can all be discussed with your child's teacher. Each school has a student services team consisting of a school social worker, a school counselor, and a school psychologist, who can follow up with you, gather more information, and suggest next steps.

For academic support, each building has reading and math interventionists who work with small groups of students needing supplemental instruction. Criteria, including assessment data and teacher observations, exists for students to enter these interventions. Similarly, for behavioral support, the student services team collaborates with classroom teachers to implement strategies that best support the student. The student services team also offers small group social skills instruction based on individual student needs.



If your child needs support in social-emotional learning, the student services team can provide small group or one-on-one instruction tailored to your child's needs. For example, they may run groups related to anxiety, self-regulation or coping strategies. If despite these interventions, you feel that your child's behavior or social emotional needs are significant, you can discuss with the student services team what the best next steps should be for your child.

Should I refer my child for a special education evaluation?

If you believe your child has a disability, the best person to reach out to is the school psychologist at your child's school. School Psychologists coordinate all special education evaluations for their school, so they can help you decide on whether or not to make a formal referral for a special education evaluation for your child.

If you would like the District to do an evaluation to determine if your child has a disability, there are two types of evaluations that can be done. A special education referral can be done that will help determine if your child has a disability and if your child needs specialized instruction in order to be successful in school. The second type of evaluation is a Section 504 evaluation, which also determines whether or not your child has a disability, and whether or not they need a Section 504 Accommodation Plan.

(Please see page 10 for a more detailed description of each type of evaluation.)

What if my child's doctor has a concern about development or delays in development?



If your child's doctor has a concern about your child's development, the best next step is to reach out to your child's teacher, as well as the school psychologist at your child's school. Often medical professionals suggest that the school provide special education services, without understanding the process required to qualify for special education services. It's important to understand that even if a doctor suggests that your child has a disability and needs school-based services, the District is still required to do an evaluation and determine, based on the state criteria, if your child is eligible for special education services or not.

Who should I contact if my child attends a private school in the Waunakee area?

If your child attends a private school in the Waunakee Community School District boundaries, the District is responsible for evaluating your child if you believe they have a disability. However, the District is not required to provide special education services in a private school setting, so in order to receive most special education services, your child must attend a public school. The one exception to this rule, is if your child has a speech/language disability, then the District will provide that one service in the private school setting.

What should I do if I have a concern about my child who is 3 or 4 years old and not in school yet?

If you have a concern about your child who is currently 3 or 4 years old and does not attend school yet, you should reach out to the Director of Special Education for the District, so that she can connect you with the appropriate staff members. If your child is younger than 3 years old and receives county Birth to Three Services, the Birth to Three providers will do a special education referral to the District prior to your child turning 3 if they believe they will continue to need services when they turn 3. The District starts providing special education services to students beginning at age 3, assuming the child has met the state criteria for a category of special education.

What is the process if I want to make a referral for a special education evaluation for my child?

- 1. Contact the School Psychologist:** Reach out to the School Psychologist at your child's school to express your concerns and inquire about the referral process.
- 2. Parental Rights:** Understand that parents/guardians have the right to refer their child for a special education evaluation at any time.
- 3. Special Education Referral Form:** Be prepared to share information about the concerns you have for your child, including the following:
 - a. Why you believe your child has a disability
 - b. Specific areas of concern (e.g., academics, communication, social emotional learning, physical health, vision, hearing, fine motor or gross motor)
 - c. Any outside services your child has received (e.g., medical providers, tutors)
- 4. IEP Team Formation:**

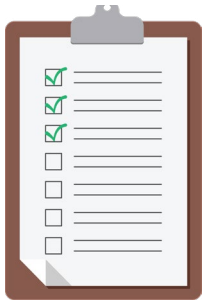
Once the referral is submitted, the School Psychologist will assemble an Individual Education Program (IEP) team, which includes the team members listed on the right sidebar.

- a. Parents/Guardians
 - b. Child (when appropriate)
 - c. LEA (Local Education Agency) Representative (e.g., School Psychologist or Administrator)
 - d. Regular Education Teacher
 - e. Special Education Teacher
 - f. Related service providers, if appropriate (e.g., Speech/Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists)
- 5. Review of Existing Data:** The IEP team will hold a short meeting to discuss what assessments are needed for your child's evaluation.
- 6. Assessment Process:** After the Review of Existing Data meeting, you will receive a consent form to sign so that the District can legally administer the assessments that are part of the evaluation. Assessments may require multiple testing sessions, and your child may be removed from class for these testing sessions. Other forms of testing can include rating scales that caregivers and teachers complete as well.
- 7. Consent Form:** Once you sign the consent form so that the District can administer assessments, the District has 60 calendar days to complete the assessments and hold an evaluation meeting.
- 8. Eligibility Determination Meeting:** Within 60 calendar days of receiving signed consent for testing, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team holds an eligibility determination meeting to review the evaluation results and determine if your child has a disability and needs special education services.

What disability areas are considered as part of the special education evaluation process?

- 1. Educational Autism:** Autism is a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. It can adversely affect educational performance and is often characterized by repetitive behaviors, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.
- 2. Blind and Visually Impaired:** Visual impairment, including blindness, refers to an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.
- 3. Deaf and Hard of Hearing:** Deafness means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects educational performance. Hard of hearing means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness.
- 4. Deafblind:** Deafblindness means having both hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.
- 5. Emotional Behavioral Disability:** An Emotional Behavioral Disability can encompass a broad range of behavioral and mental health conditions that significantly impact a student's ability to function in the school setting.
- 6. Intellectual Disability:** Intellectual disability means significantly low general intellectual functioning, existing with deficits in adaptive behavior that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- 7. Orthopedic Impairment:** Orthopedic impairment means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).
- 8. Other Health Impairment:** Other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems.
- 9. Significant Developmental Delay:** Significant Developmental Delay is a disability characterized by significant delays in 2 or more of the following areas:
 - » Gross or Fine Motor Skills
 - » Cognitive ability
 - » Communication
 - » Emotional deficits
 - » Adaptive skill deficits
- 10. Specific Learning Disability:** Specific learning disability refers to a disorder, or significant delay, in learning academic skills in reading, math, written language or listening comprehension.
- 11. Speech and Language:** Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- 12. Traumatic Brain Injury:** Traumatic brain injury refers to an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

What criteria is used to determine if my child has a disability?



In Wisconsin, specific criteria are established for each disability area by the State. The IEP team carefully considers the data gathered during the evaluation process to determine if your child meets the eligibility criteria in any of the disability areas. If your child is found eligible, the team then collaborates to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP document outlines the services and supports that the school will provide to meet your child's unique educational needs.

What are the components of an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

- 1. Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance:** This section outlines your child's current performance levels, including strengths and needs. It includes academic data and information related to your child's functional performance, which includes their social emotional functioning, as well as their ability to function successfully in the school setting.
- 2. Disability Related Needs:** Based on the present levels, this part of the IEP identifies specific areas where your child requires support or improvement. It highlights the educational needs that will be addressed through the IEP.
- 3. Measurable Annual Goals:** Goals are specific, measurable objectives that address your child's needs. They are designed to help your child make progress in areas of academic achievement and functional performance. Goals are tailored to your child's unique needs and abilities.
- 4. Special Education Services:** This section outlines the special education services and supports your child will receive to help them achieve their goals. It may include specialized instruction, related services, accommodations, and modifications.
- 5. Test Accommodations:** This section details any accommodations your child will receive for assessments. These accommodations are designed to ensure that your child can demonstrate their knowledge and skills on tests.
- 6. Transition Plan:** For students age 14 and older, this section outlines the transition services and activities that will help your child prepare for life after high school. It includes goals related to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living.
- 7. Behavior Support Plan:** If your child requires behavior support, this section outlines strategies and interventions to address challenging behaviors and support positive behavior in school.

How often is the IEP reviewed by the team?



An IEP team meets on an annual basis. This is a time where you will talk very specifically with your student's teachers and specialists about how your child is doing at school, in the community, and at home. It is a time to discuss your child's strengths, challenges, changes in behavior, home life, medications, or outside diagnoses. You will work with the IEP team on creating an IEP that will best support your child. The team's goal is to work with you to provide the best possible services and supports to meet your child's needs. It is also important to know that an IEP team can reconvene at any time during the school year per your request or anyone on the team's request.

Preparing for Your Child's IEP Meeting

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting is an important opportunity to collaborate with your child's school team to ensure your child receives the support they need. Here are some steps to help you prepare for the meeting:

- 1. Reflect on Your Child's Strengths, Interests, and Challenges:** Consider what your child excels at, what they enjoy, and where they may need extra support.
- 2. Current Goals and Skills:** Reflect on your child's current goals and skills.
- 3. Review Current IEP and Progress Reports:** Familiarize yourself with your child's current IEP, including their needs, goals, and services.
- 4. List of Discussion Items:** Make a list of topics you want to discuss at the meeting, including any questions, concerns, or suggestions you may have.
- 5. Consider IEP Team Members:** Think about who you want to invite to the meeting. You have the option to include other adults who have knowledge of your child's needs or who can provide support.
- 6. Notify the School:** If you plan to invite someone from outside the school, such as a friend, relative, or outside provider, inform the school in advance.
- 7. Discuss the Meeting with Your Child:** If your child will attend the meeting, talk to them about what to expect and what will be discussed. Encourage your child to share their thoughts and feelings.



How often will the IEP team reevaluate my child?

Once your child is in the special education program, your child will have a re-evaluation meeting every three years. During this time, your child's special education teacher will talk with you about doing specific testing in your child's identified areas of need to look at his or her progress over time. This will help the special education teachers and specialists have a clear and updated vision of your child's current skills and set new goals based on this data. As part of the reevaluation process, the team will also review the data that was collected during the reevaluation to decide if your child continues to meet the criteria for their area of disability and whether or not they continue to need special education services.

What happens if I disagree with an IEP team decision?

If you disagree with your child's IEP team, it's important to remember that you are an integral member of the team, and your opinion is valuable. During the IEP meeting, if there is a decision you do not agree with, you can request to schedule another meeting to discuss the concern that needs to be addressed. It's also within your rights to ask to include the Director of Special Education in the meeting, as she can provide additional insights and support. You may also consider adding an advocate to your team; advocates can offer guidance and support throughout the process. The Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System is also available to help resolve disagreements when a resolution cannot be reached. While parents play a crucial role in the decision-making process, the Local Education Agency (LEA) representative on the IEP team makes the final decisions if the team cannot come to consensus.



When should my child exit special education?



Every three years, the IEP team will reevaluate your child to determine if they are still eligible for services. If your child no longer meets the state criteria for special education, they may exit the program. However, if you feel that your child's needs have changed significantly, you can request a reevaluation at any time. Generally, the District does not conduct reevaluations if the student has been reevaluated in the last 12 months. It's also important to know that as a parent, you have the right to remove your child from special education services at any time, even if they still qualify for special education services.

Your child's well-being and educational success are the top priorities, and decisions regarding their special education services should be made with their best interests in mind.

What is the difference between an IEP and a Section 504 Plan?

On page 4, there were two types of evaluations listed that can be conducted to determine if your child has a disability. The first type of evaluation addressed earlier in the guide was related to a referral for a special education evaluation. The second type of evaluation is a Section 504 evaluation. There are some differences between an IEP and a Section 504 Accommodation Plan.

Differences Between Special Education and Section 504

<u>Special Education Evaluation</u>	<u>Section 504 Evaluation</u>
The goal is to determine if the student has a disability.	The goal is to determine if the student has a disability.
An evaluation must be conducted in order to determine if the student has a disability.	An evaluation must be conducted in order to determine if the student has a disability.
The team reviews state criteria to determine if the student has a disability and qualifies for special education services.	The team must determine if the student's disability substantially limits a major life activity, which can include learning, reading, concentrating, or thinking, just to name a few.
If the student is found eligible and has a need for special education services, then the team develops an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for the student.	If the student is found eligible under Section 504, the team develops a Section 504 plan for the student.
An IEP identifies the student's special education needs, goals, accommodations and specially designed instruction that the student requires in order to be successful in their educational setting.	Section 504 plans focus on providing accommodations and removing barriers in the general education environment. Section 504 Plans do not include specialized instruction or specific measurable goals for your child to meet.



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Glossary

Adaptive Skills: Adaptive skills, also known as life skills, are the skills needed to live independently and effectively in daily life, such as communication, self-care, social skills, and the ability to work and follow rules.

BIP/BSP: BIP stands for Behavior Intervention Plan, and BSP stands for Behavior Support Plan. These plans outline strategies and supports to address challenging behaviors and promote positive behavior in students.

Disability: A disability is a physical, sensory, cognitive, or developmental condition that significantly impacts a person's ability to perform daily activities, including learning.

DPI: DPI stands for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, which oversees public education in the state.

ESY: ESY stands for Extended School Year, which is a special education service that provides instruction and related services beyond the regular school year for students with disabilities who require it to prevent regression of skills.

Executive Functioning: Executive functioning refers to the cognitive skills that help individuals plan, organize, manage time, pay attention, and regulate emotions to achieve goals.

FAPE: FAPE stands for Free Appropriate Public Education, which is a requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that mandates eligible students with disabilities receive education that is tailored to their individual needs at no cost to the family.

IDEA: IDEA stands for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law that ensures students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs.

IEP: IEP stands for Individualized Education Program, which is a written plan developed for each student eligible for special education that outlines their educational goals, services, and accommodations.

LEA: LEA stands for Local Education Agency, which is the public school district responsible for providing education to students within a specific district.

LRE: LRE stands for Least Restrictive Environment, which is a requirement under IDEA that students with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who are not disabled.

MTSS: MTSS stands for Multi-Tiered System of Support, which is a framework used by schools to provide early intervention and support to students at risk for academic or behavioral difficulties.

Transition: Transition refers to the process of preparing students with disabilities for life after high school, including further education, employment, and independent living.



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MISSION STATEMENT

"Committed to Children...Committed to Community...Committed to Excellence"

VISION STATEMENT

The Waunakee Community School District is a collaborative learning community that works with students, staff, families, and the community to ensure that every student is ready for college and career; through a focus on data, research based best practices, and engagement with students to be active partners in their learning.

DISTRICT WEBSITE

www.waunakee.k12.wi.us

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