COLORADO
Department of Education

Colorado IEP Parent Training

Module 2: Special Education Evaluation

May 15, 2026

Module 2 overview

- What is a special education evaluation?
- Overview of evaluation process
- Referral and child find
- Notice and consent for evaluation
- Explanation of prior written notice (PWN)
- Timeline
- Reevaluation
- Evaluation procedures
- Independent educational evaluation (IEE)

Review of acronyms

- **IDEA**: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- **ECEA**: The Exceptional Children's Educational Act
- **CDE**: Colorado Department of Education
- **AU**: Administrative Unit, which includes school districts and Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES), etc.
- **FAPE**: Free Appropriate Public Education
- **IEP**: Individualized Education Program
- **PSN**: Procedural Safeguards Notice

What is a special education evaluation?

- Public schools evaluate children who may have a disability. They use the information to determine if the child is eligible for special education.
- Evaluation information is also used to develop the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- A child cannot receive special education without being evaluated by the school / AU.
- Parent consent is required for the school / AU to do the evaluation.
- The school / AU must conduct an evaluation even if a child has already had a private evaluation. The school / AU must consider the results of the private evaluation if provided by the parent.

Overview of evaluation process

1. Referral or request for evaluation.
2. Informed consent of parent to initial evaluation. (Or notice to parents that their request for an evaluation is denied.)
3. The school conducts an evaluation that meets IDEA's requirements.
4. A notice of meeting is given to the parents.
5. A multidisciplinary team that includes the parents meets to determine eligibility for special education.
6. If the child is eligible, the multidisciplinary team meets to develop the IEP.

Who can make the referral

- The referral can come from:
  - Parents
  - The AU or a state-operated program because of a building level screen and/or referral process.
  - A Department of Early Childhood (DEC) program.
  - An interested person who works with the parent or the appropriate AU, state-operated program, or DEC program.
  - ECEA Rule 4.02(3)(a).

Parent request for an evaluation

- Parents do not need to request an evaluation in writing.
- It is helpful to make a written request, so you have a record.
- In your request, you can ask about the process to get the Prior Written Notice & Consent form (covered in slides 10-12).



Ongoing ”child find” obligation

- Public schools have a responsibility to identify children who need special education services. These children must be **“identified, located, and evaluated.”** 34 CFR § 300.111
- Schools have an ongoing responsibility to identify children **up to age 21,** including**:**
  - children who have not yet entered school,
  - children who discontinue their education,
  - children who are attending private schools,
  - children whose parents choose home schooling,
  - children who are wards of the State, or
  - children who are highly mobile (such as migrant or homeless children).
  - ECEA Rule 4.02(1)(a).
- Each AU must have a designated person who handles the Child Find process.

Students **parentally placed** in private school

- Parents of children attending private school may request that the public school do an evaluation of their child in the AU where the private school is located.
- If the child is eligible for special education, parents may choose to enroll their child in public school to receive a free appropriate public education through an IEP.
- If the parent chooses to keep their child enrolled in a private school, then the child will not have an IEP. The child might receive some services through a service plan.

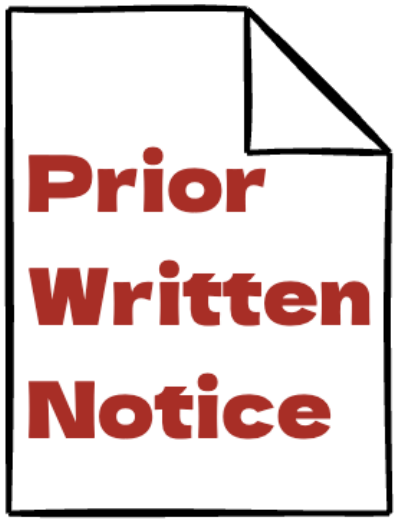
Notice and consent for evaluation

- When a child is referred for evaluation, parents must be given a **Procedural Safeguards Notice** (PSN) that explains their rights.
- The school must give the parents "**prior written notice**" that it is proposing to evaluate the child.
- The notice must include the areas of evaluation and the reasons. (More on PWN requirements in next slides.)
- Parent consent is required for the school / AU to conduct the evaluation.



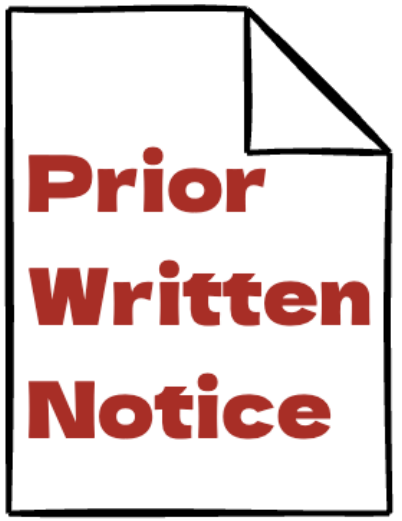
Prior written notice -1

- The Administrative Unit (AU) must give "**prior written notice**" (PWN) before it proposes or refuses to take certain actions.
- These actions include initiating or changing:
  - the identification, evaluation or educational placement of the child (services the child is receiving), or
  - how they are providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child.



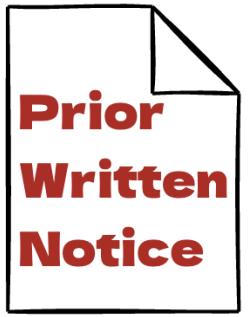
Prior written notice -2

- The PWN must be in clear language that is understandable to the general public.
- The PWN must be in the parent's native language or other mode of communication unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.
- The notice must give enough detail for parents to take part in decisions in an informed way.



Prior written notice-3

- Prior Written Notice must include:
  - A description of the action proposed or refused;
  - An explanation of why;
  - A description of the information the school used to make its decision;
  - A description of other options considered and why they were rejected;
  - Other factors relevant to the decision;
  - A statement that parents have protection under IDEA's procedural safeguards; and
  - Where parents can get assistance in understanding IDEA's requirements.
  - 34 C.F.R. § 300.503(b).



Denial of request for evaluation

- If the school denies a parent request for an evaluation, they must give the parents Prior Written Notice (PWN). The PWN must explain why the evaluation was denied.
- The PWN must include the information listed on the previous slide.
- If the school does not give you a PWN when an evaluation is denied, ask for it.

Response to intervention

- Classrooms have interventions in place to support struggling learners. These include Response to Intervention (RTI) and interventions in a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework.
- The school measures how a child responds to intervention. This information can supplement the evaluation information.
- The Response to Intervention (RTI) process cannot be used to delay or deny an evaluation.



Timeline

- The initial evaluation must be completed within **60 calendar days** after the signed parent consent is received by the AU. ECEA Rule 4.02(3)(c).
- The eligibility meeting must be held within a reasonable time after the initial evaluation is completed. ECEA Rule 4.02(6)(a)(i).
- If the child is eligible, the IEP must be developed within **90 calendar days** of receipt of the signed parent consent for the initial evaluation. ECEA Rule 4.03(1)(d)(i).



Evaluation scenario

- About 3 weeks after a student started a new school year at a new school, the parents met with the child's teacher. They had concerns relating to academic work and behavior. They asked for their child to be evaluated for special education.
- The teacher said the child was still getting used to the new school. They provided data showing that the child was responding well to interventions provided in class. They didn't see signs of a disability in the classroom.
- At the end of the 9-week quarter, the child's grades were below expectations, and some teachers expressed concerns. Parent again requested an evaluation. The teacher said that they would set up a meeting to discuss the parents' concerns.
- The parents did not hear anything for 2 weeks and followed up with the teacher with a written email. It is now 3 months into the school year, and nothing has happened.

Evaluation scenario parent options

- The parents should follow up any verbal requests to the school in writing. This is not required, but it is helpful to have a written record.
- The parents can contact the school administrator in charge of special education or the Special Education Director for the AU to try to move things forward.
- The parents can consider using one of the IDEA dispute resolution (DR) options.
  - Mediation
  - State Complaint
  - Due Process Complaint
- **Module 9** on Resolving Disagreements includes more information on DR options.

Reevaluation

- Once a student has been found eligible for special education, a reevaluation must occur at least once every three years.
- Eligibility will be considered at every IEP reevaluation.
- A parent or the AU can request a reevaluation sooner if they have concerns that the child's educational needs have changed.
- The parent and AU can agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary.

Evaluation procedures

- IDEA says that the evaluation must:
  - Use a variety of assessment tools.
  - Gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information.
  - Not be discriminatory or have cultural or racial bias.
  - Be administered in the child's native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.
  - Assess the child in all areas of suspected disability.
  - Be comprehensive to identify all the child’s needs for special education and related services.

Assessment tools

- Types of assessment tools might include:
  - Formal standardized tests of intelligence, academic achievement, or other areas of functioning
  - Informal assessments such as classroom and parent observations
  - Measures of adaptive behavior or executive functioning
  - Skills checklists
  - Samples of work
  - Input from other professionals
  - Information from parents and student

Requests for information from parents

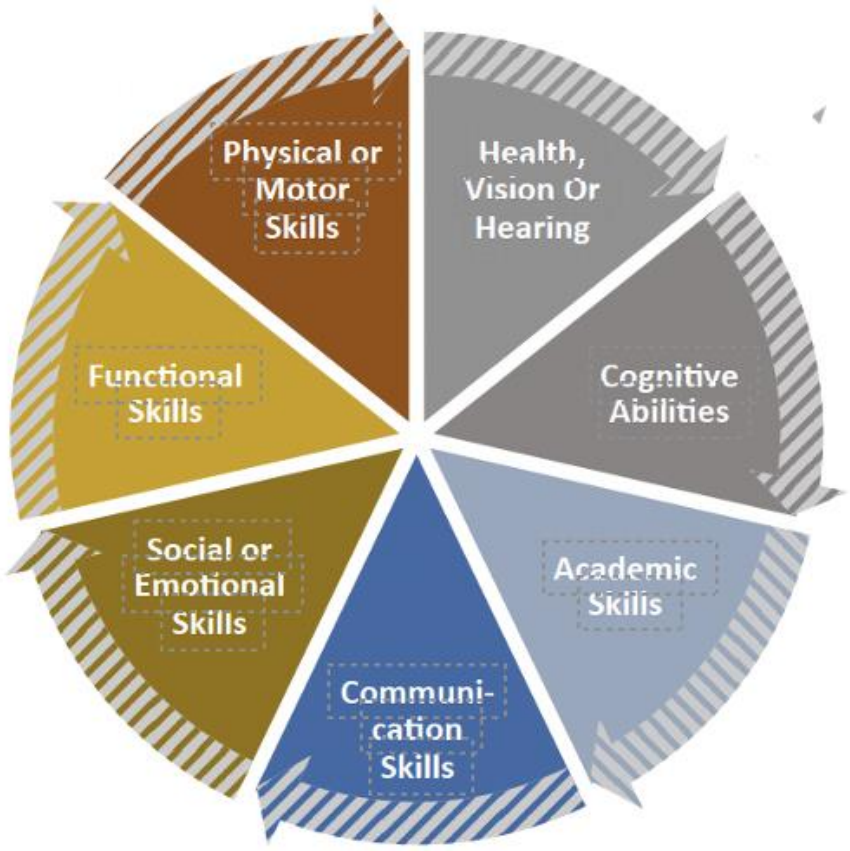
- Parents may be asked to provide information in a variety of formats.
- These could include:
  - Interviews
  - Forms (e.g., medical, developmental, or social history)
  - Questionnaires or “rating scales” (e.g., a frequency scale that asks how often different behaviors occur)
  - Releases to allow school staff to talk to professionals who work with the child
- Parents can share other information that they think is important for the team to know.

Nondiscriminatory and unbiased evaluation

- IDEA requires that the evaluation not have racial or cultural bias. The evaluation cannot disadvantage a child because of their race, ethnicity, or culture.
- The evaluation procedures must be “valid.” They must measure what they claim to measure.

Areas of suspected disability

- Areas of assessment include, as appropriate:
  - Health, vision, or hearing
  - Cognitive abilities
  - Academic skills
  - Communicative skills
  - Social and emotional functioning
  - Adaptive/functional skills
  - Physical or motor abilities



Evaluation if behavior is a concern

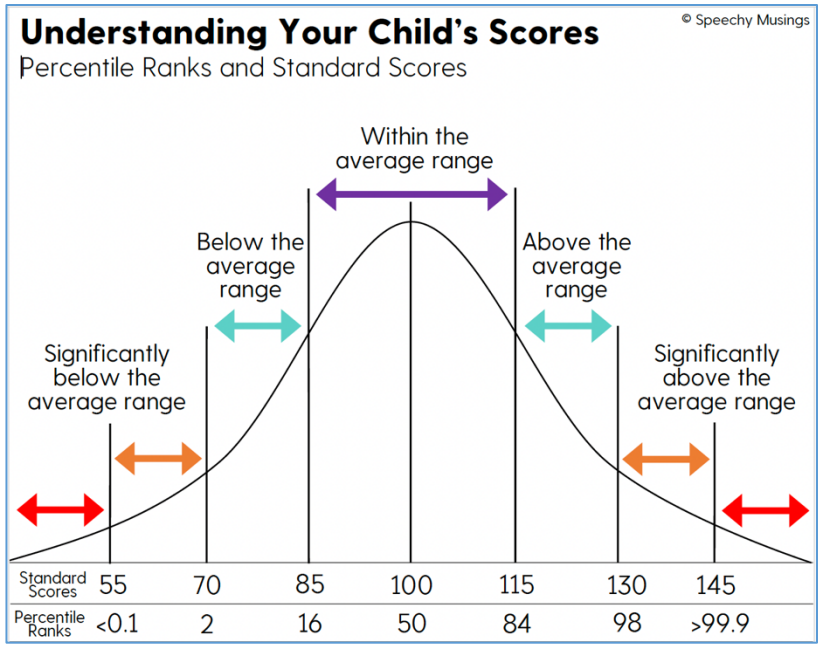
- If a child's behavior is interfering with their learning or the learning of others, behavior must be assessed. Behavior can be assessed in a variety of ways.
- One method to gather information about behavior is a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). An FBA helps the IEP team understand the underlying reasons or "function" of the interfering behavior.
- The team will develop behavior supports and strategies based on the assessment information. If appropriate, the team may decide to develop a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). A BIP outlines strategies to help the child use more positive behaviors.

Evaluation report

- The school must give a copy of the evaluation report to the parents.
- The evaluation report does not include a determination of a disability category or recommendation of eligibility. The multidisciplinary team will determine this based on the evaluation data. School staff cannot “predetermine” this information without the parents.
- Evaluation reports can be hard to understand. Parents can request a meeting to go over the evaluation reports before the eligibility meeting. Parents can also ask questions during the eligibility meeting about what the data or any terminology means.

Standard scores

- Evaluation reports often include standard scores – using a scale that has an average score of 100 and normal limits of functioning fall within 85 to 115.
- The report may also show percentile ranks – the percentage of individuals in the comparison group that scored below a particular score (e.g., a 70th percentile score means the score is higher than 70% of others in the group).
- Looking at the scores on a bell curve can be helpful.



Independent educational evaluation

- An independent educational evaluation (IEE) is done by someone outside of the AU.
  - "Independent educational evaluation means an evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the public agency responsible for the education of the child in question." 34 CFR § 300.502(a).
- Parents can obtain an IEE at their own expense.
- If the parents provide an IEE report, the IEP team must consider the IEE. The IEE will be considered as part of the school's evaluation.

IEE at public expense

- Parents can request an IEE **at public expense** if they disagree with the school's evaluation.
- A parent is entitled to only one independent educational evaluation at public expense for each evaluation. 34 CFR §300.502(b)(5).
- The AU can pay for the IEE or request a due process hearing to show that their evaluation is appropriate. If the evaluation is found to be appropriate, the AU does not have to pay for IEE.
- More information about requesting an IEE can be found on pages 5 -7 of Colorado's Procedural Safeguards Notice (PSN).

IEE scenario

- Parents have concerns about their child's learning and behavior.
- The school has completed an evaluation.
- The multidisciplinary team (MDT) met to review the results and discuss eligibility.
- The MDT determined that the child did not meet the criteria for any disability category under IDEA and ECEA.
- Parents do not think the determination is correct.

IEE scenario parent options

- Parents can tell the AU that they disagree with the evaluation. Parents do not have to explain the reasons why they disagree.
- Parents can request that the AU pay for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). Parents can also request reimbursement for an IEE for which they already paid. If the evaluation does not meet the AU's criteria, the AU does not have to pay.
- Parents are not required to make the request in writing. Written documentation helps to show you made the request.
- The school district must either:
  - Tell the parent how to arrange the IEE and pay for it.
  - Ask for a due process hearing to show that its evaluation was appropriate. The due process decision will determine if the AU must pay or not.

Individual support

Families, educators, and other professionals with questions about Special Education or needing assistance can contact CDE's Office of Special Education.

Phone: 720-926-1453

Email:

Parents_ESSUquestions@cde.state.co.us



CDE/Colorado resources

- CDE, Colorado Procedural Safeguards Notice (linked on CDE's Individualized Education Program page and at Dispute Resolution, Parent and Child Rights in Special Education)
- CDE, Child Find for Children Ages 3 through 5
- CDE, Guidelines for Identifying Preschool Children for Special Education
- CDE, Response to Intervention
- CDE, Colorado Multi-Tiered System of Supports
- CDE, Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)
- CDE, Multilingual Learners Identified With or Suspected of Having Educational Disabilities

More resources (not specific to CO)

- Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR), Requesting an Initial Evaluation for Special Education Services
- CPIR, Your Child's Evaluation
- CPIR, Right to Obtain an IEE
- CPIR, Evaluating School-Aged Children for Disability
- US ED, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Q&A on Children Placed by Parents in Private Schools
- US ED, OSERS, Office of Special Education Programs Memorandum 11-07 (RTI process cannot be used to delay evaluation)
- CPIR, Right to Receive Prior Written Notice