

DEMYSTIFYING THE Evaluation Process

A guide to what happens after a concern is shared, why evaluations take time, and how you are part of the team.

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**Concern → Plan →
Consent → Evaluation
→ Eligibility →
Supports**

**Goal: understand your child's
learning needs — not just
produce paperwork.**

When a concern or request is noted

The process starts with a question: What does this student need to be successful?



A concern is shared

A parent/guardian, teacher, student, or team member notices that learning, communication, behavior, health, or development may need more support.



The team listens

The school gathers information, talks with the family, and looks for patterns across settings — not just one hard day or one low score.



Next steps are planned

The team may adjust supports, begin or continue interventions, or consider a special education evaluation.

Families can ask questions at any point. A request for evaluation should be discussed with the school team.

Step 1: Gather information

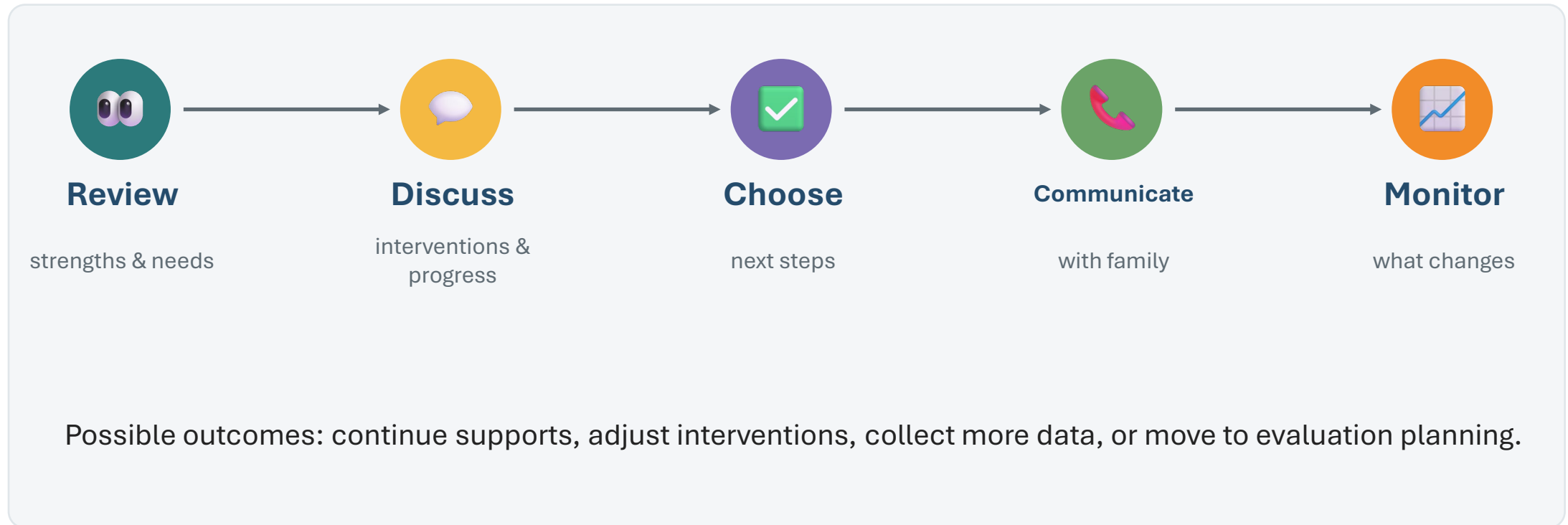
Before deciding on an evaluation plan, the team looks at what is already known.

-  **Strengths** What does your child enjoy? What works well?
-  **Concerns** What is getting in the way at school or at home?
-  **School data** Grades, work samples, attendance, behavior, and progress data.
-  **Family input** Developmental history, medical updates, outside reports, and observations.

This helps the team avoid guessing and keeps the conversation focused on the student's needs.

Step 2: Student Support / Study Team

This is often where the team reviews data and decides what to try next.



Step 3: Interventions and progress monitoring

Interventions are targeted supports matched to the concern.



What is tried?

A specific support or strategy connected to the area of concern.



How long?

Often 8–12 weeks, depending on the concern and student need.



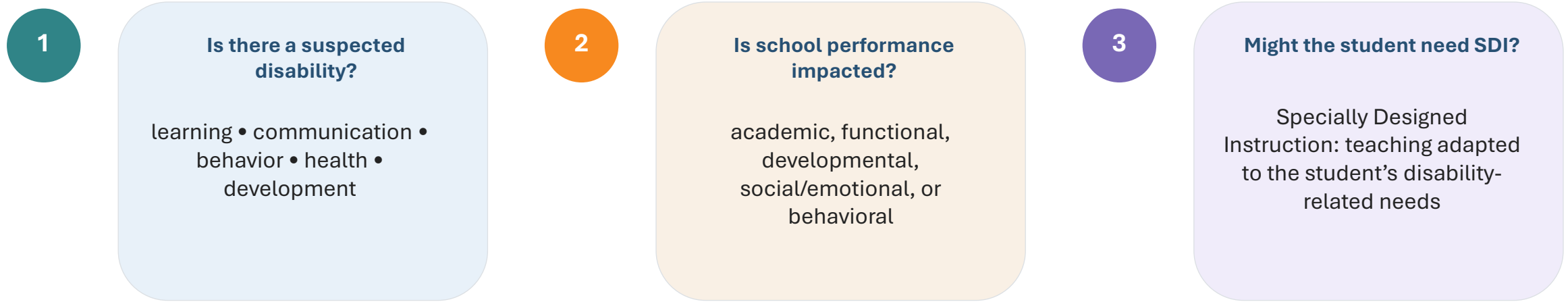
How do we know?

The team collects progress data and shares results.

Important: Interventions should support students early — they should not be used to delay or deny an evaluation when a disability is suspected.

When does the team consider a special education evaluation?

The question is not “Is the student struggling?” It is “Do we suspect a disability that may require specialized instruction?”



A parent/guardian may request a special education evaluation. The school team may also recommend one.

A request for a special education evaluation does not automatically mean the team will conduct one. The team must first “consider the request” and review the information available. The team may move forward with an evaluation or identify additional supports, interventions, or strategies. If the team decides not to evaluate, it will provide written documentation explaining the decision.



Questions about the referral process?

Evaluation planning meeting: what happens?

The team decides what information is needed and how to gather it.

- 1 Review** strengths, concerns, interventions, progress, work samples
- 2 Ask** what questions must the evaluation answer?
- 3 Plan** which areas and assessments are needed?
- 4 Explain** timelines, roles, and parent rights
- 5 Consent** parent/guardian signs permission before testing begins

Families help decide what should be evaluated by sharing what they know about their child.

Evaluation planning: deciding what we need to know

The team starts with questions — then chooses assessments that can help answer them.

ABC Reading / Math

academic skills

Communication

speech & language

Attention / Behavior

learning readiness

Social / Emotional

well-being & relationships

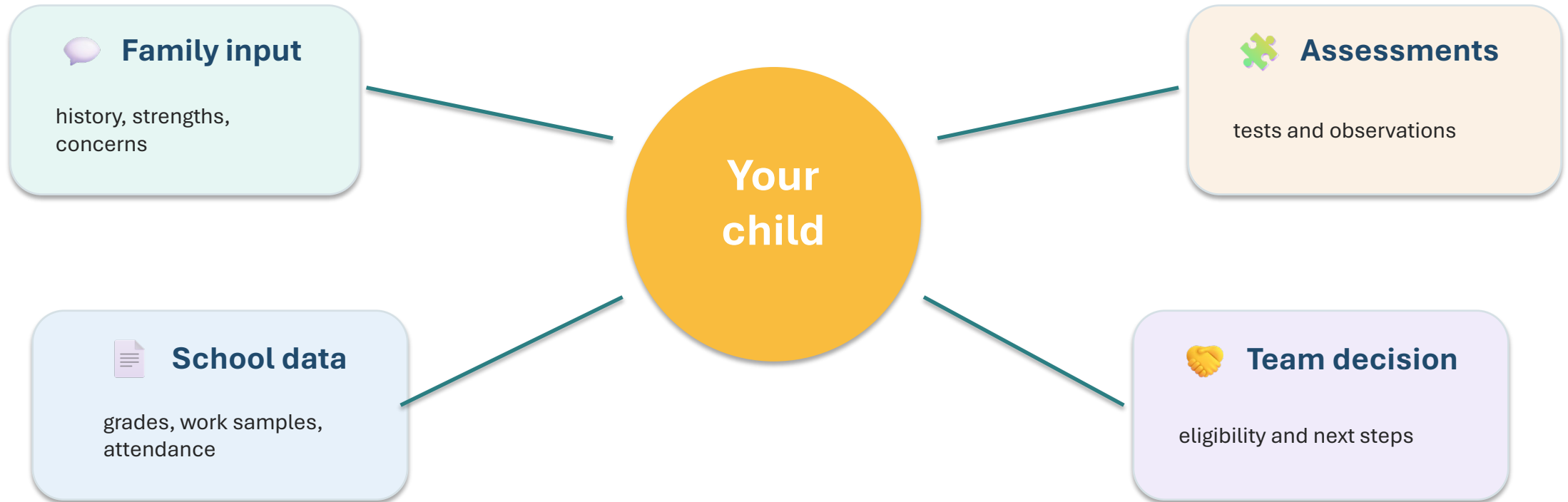
Health / Motor

vision, hearing, OT/PT, medical

The plan should be individualized. Not every student needs every type of assessment.

The big picture

An evaluation is a process of gathering information from many sources.



No single score tells the whole story.
We look at the complete picture to understand your child
and how we best support their learning.

What consent means

Consent gives permission to complete the evaluation plan — it does not mean your child automatically qualifies for special education.



You are saying “yes” to...

The assessments and information-gathering listed in the evaluation plan.



You can ask...

What each assessment is for, who will complete it, and how the results will be shared.



The timeline starts...

After written consent from a parent/guardian is received. In Oregon, this evaluation period is 60 school days.

The team will meet again to review results and make an eligibility decision together.

What happens during the 60 school days?

Different team members gather information, complete assessments, and look for patterns.

During this time, school supports do not stop. The team continues to support the student while the evaluation is underway.



What might the evaluation include?

Only areas related to the suspected disability and educational needs are evaluated.

ABC Academic

reading • writing • math



Cognitive / Thinking

problem solving • memory •
reasoning



Speech / Language

understanding • expression •
social language



Social / Emotional / Behavior

attention • emotions • behavior
patterns



Health / Vision / Hearing

medical • vision • hearing •
endurance



Motor / Adaptive

movement • daily living •
independence

Your role as a parent or guardian

You know your child in ways no assessment can capture.



Share strengths

Interests, motivators, talents, culture, language, and what helps your child feel successful.



Share concerns

What you see at home, with homework, friendships, routines, communication, or emotions.



Share history

Developmental, medical, family, outside evaluation, and previous school information.



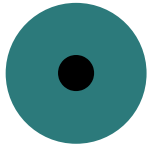
Complete forms

You might be asked to complete standardized rating scales regarding your insights into specific emotional, social, and behavioral needs.

Your input should be documented and considered as part of the evaluation report and team decision.

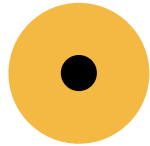
Who is at the eligibility meeting?

The decision is made by a team — not by one person.



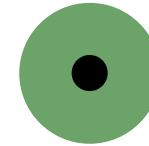
Parent / Guardian

family knowledge



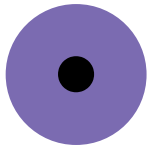
General Education Teacher

classroom & curriculum



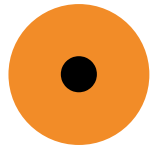
Special Education Teacher

specialized instruction



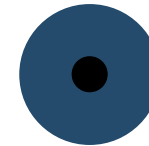
School Psychologist / Evaluator

assessment results



District Representative

resources & decisions



Student

when appropriate

Parents/guardians can invite someone to support them.

Making sense of test scores

Scores are one piece of the story.



Scores tell us

how a student performed on a task compared with same-age or same-grade peers.



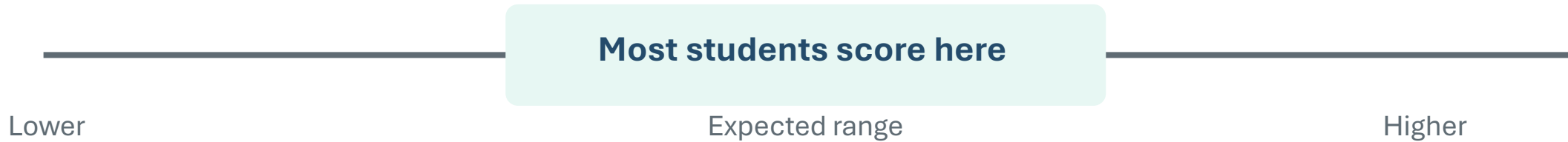
Patterns matter

across tests, classroom work, observations, and family input.



Questions matter

What does this mean for instruction and support?



A score alone does not determine eligibility.

Eligibility is not the same as a medical diagnosis



Medical diagnosis

Identifies a medical, developmental, or mental health condition. It can be important information for the team.



Educational eligibility

Determines whether the student meets school criteria, is impacted at school, and needs SDI.

A diagnosis may support the evaluation, but the school team still has to answer the educational eligibility questions.

Eligibility: the team answers three key questions

- 1 Does the student have a disability that meets educational eligibility criteria?
- 2 Does the disability impact access to general education?
- 3 Does the student require Specially Designed Instruction (SDI)?

If the answer is “no” to any question, the team plans general education supports instead.

What does SDI mean?

Specially Designed Instruction is the heart of special education.

SDI = What we TEACH and HOW we teach it differently because of the student's disability.

It is individualized instruction - not simply extra help or a different location.

C

CONTENT

What is taught or emphasized

M

METHODOLOGY

The instructional approach or strategy

D

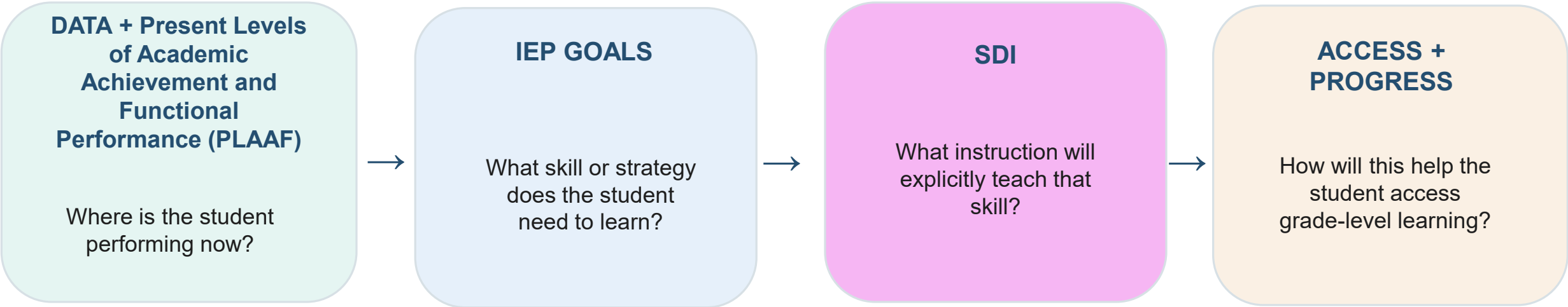
DELIVERY

How, when, or in what manner instruction is provided

IDEA: SDI adapts the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address unique disability-related needs and ensure access to the general curriculum.

What Oregon guidance emphasizes

SDI should connect directly to the student’s identified needs and IEP.



Oregon Departs of Education (ODE)’s key test:

If the instruction is not targeting the skills or strategies needed for IEP goals and access to the general curriculum, it is probably not SDI.

SDI or an accommodation?

Both matter - but they serve different purposes.

SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION

TEACHES a skill or strategy the student needs because of the disability.

- Explicitly teaching a decoding strategy
- Direct instruction in organizing a written response
- Teaching a self-monitoring or regulation strategy
- Systematic instruction with modeling, guided practice, feedback, and progress monitoring

Example: Teaches a student how to read Braille

ACCOMMODATION / SUPPORT

PROVIDES ACCESS so the student can participate or demonstrate learning.

- Extended time
- Preferential seating
- Audio or text-to-speech access
- Calculator, graphic organizer, or reduced-distraction setting

Example: Provides books in Braille

A student may need BOTH SDI and accommodations. An accommodation does not replace instruction in the disability-related skill.

A quick SDI check

Before calling something SDI, ask these questions.

1

Is it individualized?

Is this instruction based on this student's disability-related needs?

2

What is being taught?

Can we name the specific skill or strategy the student is learning?

3

What is adapted?

Are we adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction?

4

Is there a through-line?

Does it connect to the PLAAF, IEP goal, and access to the general curriculum?

If the answer is simply “extra help,” “more time,” or “a special education setting,” keep digging: What specialized instruction is the student actually receiving?

What happens after the eligibility decision?



If the student IS eligible

- The team identifies educational needs
- An IEP is developed
- Goals, services, accommodations, and placement are discussed
- The IEP is reviewed at least annually



If the student is NOT eligible

- The team explains the decision
- General education supports may continue or change
- A 504 plan may be considered when appropriate
- Families can ask questions about next steps

Either way, the goal is to understand what support helps the student make progress.

Words you may hear

Translation for a few common terms.

IDEA Federal special education law

IEP Individualized Education Program

SDI Specially Designed Instruction

PWN Written explanation of a school decision

Accommodation Changes how a student accesses learning

Modification Changes what a student is expected to learn

LRE Least Restrictive Environment — learning with peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate

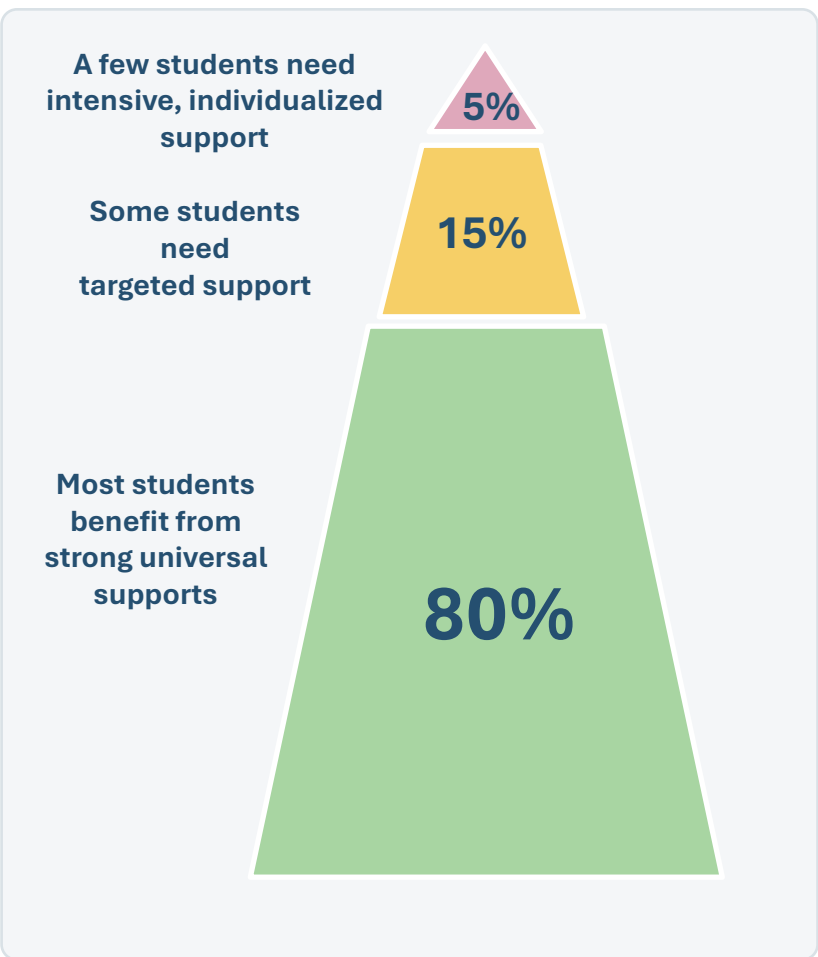
FAPE Free Appropriate Public Education — individualized special education and services provided at no cost to families

Provider The staff member or professional who provides an IEP service

Placement Where and how the student receives special education services, based on the IEP and LRE

Pyramid of Supports

Different levels of support for different needs

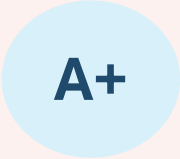


Tier 3 Intensive / individualized	For a few students who need more support Individualized instruction Behavior or social-emotional supports Frequent check-ins and progress monitoring
Tier 2 Targeted supports	For some students who need extra support Small-group or targeted intervention Mentor, counselor, or check-in support Progress monitoring and adjustments
Tier 1 Universal supports	For all students High-quality classroom instruction Clear routines and positive behavior supports Schoolwide programs, tutoring, and family communication

Supports are matched to student need — students may move between levels as needs change.

The goal is the right support, at the right time, so every student can thrive.

Common myths — and what is actually true

A+

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MYTH: “A low test score means my child qualifies.”

FACT: Eligibility is based on multiple sources and the three eligibility questions.

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MYTH: “A diagnosis automatically creates an IEP.”

FACT: The team must also show school impact and need for specially designed instruction (SDI).

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MYTH: “An evaluation is only testing.”

FACT: Evaluations include data, observations, records, and family input.

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MYTH: “Special education is a place.”

FACT: Special education is a set of services and supports.

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MYTH: “Once a child is in special education, they will always be in special education.”

FACT: At least every three years, the team meets and determines if your child continues to qualify — asking the three eligibility questions again. **Celebrate if they no longer need services!**

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MYTH: “My child needs an IEP for college.”

FACT: IEPs end upon completion of high school. If a student needs accommodations in college, they work with the college’s student support or disability services office to determine what they may qualify for.

Questions are welcome.

You are an important member of your child's team.

1

Ask

What is the team trying to understand?

2

Share

Strengths, concerns, history, and what you see outside school.

3

Clarify

What happens next, by when, and who will contact me?

Thank you for partnering with us.