

Understanding Special Education Assessments



**SFUSD Psychological Services
& Community Alliance for
Special Education**

Agenda

- IDEA, Child Find, Referral Process
- IDEA Eligibility Criteria
- Special Education Assessments
- Interpreting Assessment Results -
What do the results mean for my child?
- Questions & Answers

IDEA, Child Find, Referral Process

What is IDEA?

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act⁴

- Purpose of IDEA: To provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities.
- Schools must find and evaluate students suspected of having disabilities—at no cost to parents.
- Federal law that requires schools to serve the educational needs of eligible students with disabilities.

Child Find

Attending an SFUSD School

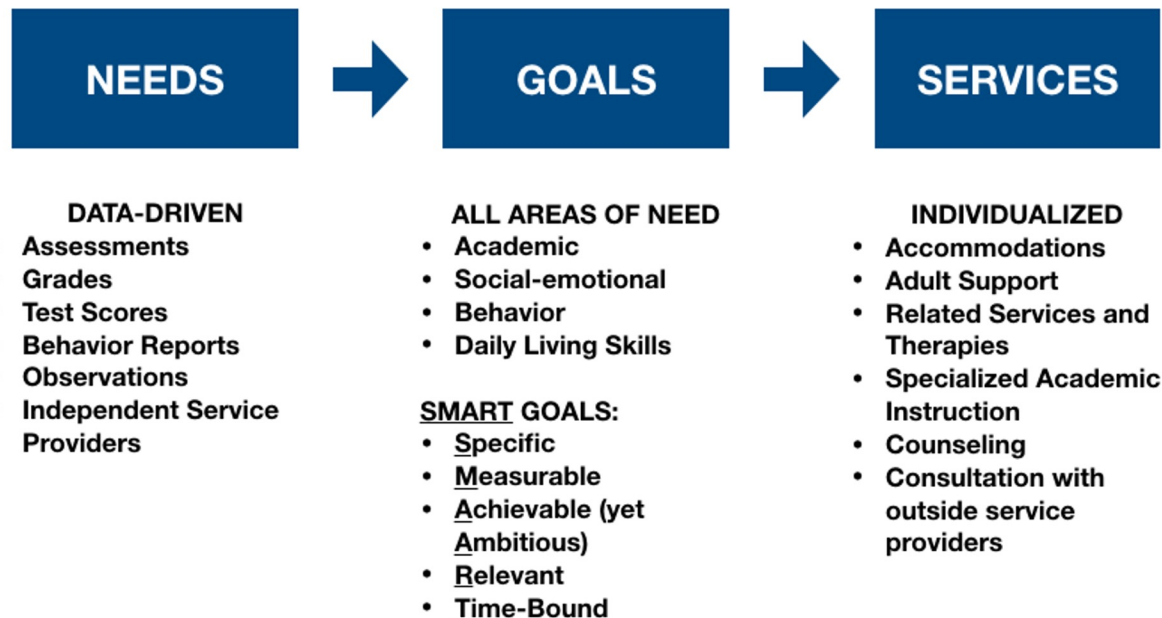
- Assessment requests should be submitted in writing.
- If parents make a verbal request for a special education assessment, school teams should help parent to put the request in writing.
- Clarify parent concerns: request is for a special education assessment and not a Section 504 plan?
- Assessment request should be sent to principal, who will direct to the appropriate assessor (e.g., psychologist, SLP, OT, etc.)

Child Find

Outside SFUSD TK-12 Schools

- **Birth -3 years old:**
[Golden Gate Regional Center](mailto:intake@ggrc.org)
intake@ggrc.org or 1-888-339-3305
- **3 to 5 years**
[Early Childhood Special Education Assessment](mailto:ecreferrals@sfusd.edu)
ecreferrals@sfusd.edu or 415-401-2525 ext 1101
- **Private/Parochial Student**
[Private/Parochial Special Education Request form](mailto:privateschoolreferrals@sfusd.edu)
privateschoolreferrals@sfusd.edu
- **More information -**
www.sfusd.edu/sped/assessments

Assessments Start the IEP Process



...THEN we talk about placement!



Why assess?

Example: “My kid has ADHD”

- Depression
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Anxiety disorder
- Learning disability
- Tourette syndrome
- Poor social history
- Lead poisoning
- Hearing Loss
- Auditory processing disorder
- Language disorder
- Physical or sexual abuse
- PTSD
- Executive dysfunction
- Head injury
- Neurological disorder
- Eating disorder

**ALL OF THESE ARE COMMONLY
MISTAKEN FOR ADHD**

Different Disability Definitions

Medical Community: *ICD-10*

Mental Health Community: *DSM-V*

Educational Community:
*Individuals with Disability Education
Act (IDEA)*

IDEA Eligibility Criteria

Educational Criteria

- An “educational disability” identified under IDEA after a school-based evaluation (ADHD can fall under an IDEA disability, usually what’s called *Other Health Impairment*).
- An IEP team at school makes the determination of educational disability.
- Schools identify disabilities based on IDEA, the federal special education law.
- Conditions must also affect the child’s ability to function in the classroom or elsewhere in school at the time they’re identified.

Medical Diagnosis

- A “medical condition or disorder” (including ADHD) identified by a medical professional.
- A doctor, a clinical child psychologist, pediatric neuropsychologist, psychiatrist, or other clinical professional makes the diagnosis.
- Medical professionals diagnose and treat conditions that are found in the DSM-V (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition*)
- Conditions don’t have to affect school performance in order for clinicians to diagnose them.

13 Educational Disabilities as defined by IDEA

- Autism
- Deaf*
- Hard of Hearing*
- Multiple Disabilities
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Deaf/Blindness*
- Emotional Disturbance
- Intellectual Disability
- Orthopedic Impairment*
- Visual Impairment*
- Established Medical Disability (3-5 years old)**

*indicates low incidence disability

**only for preschool-aged children

Special Education Assessments

Sample Assessment Plan

Schools need your informed consent to begin the assessment. You can provide that by checking your level of consent in one check box and including your signature.

SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SELPA Assessment Plan

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Name: A. Brewster, Punky

Birthdate: 9/22/2004

Date: _____

☒ Initial ☐ Plan Review ☐ Eligibility Evaluation ☐ Transition ☐ Interim ☐ Other

To parent/guardian of: Punky A. Brewster

Assessment Plan Date: _____

LEA/District: San Francisco Unified School District

School: Burton (Phillip and Sala) HS

Grade: Eleventh grade

Native language: 00 English

English Proficiency Level: _____

The local educational agency (LEA)/district proposes to assess your child to determine his/her eligibility for special education services or continued eligibility and present levels of academic performance and functional achievement. Your child will be assessed in all areas of suspected disability as needed.* To meet your child's individual education needs, this assessment will consist of an evaluation in only the areas checked by the LEA/district. *Tests and procedures conducted pursuant to these assessments may include, but are not limited to, classroom observations, rating scales, interviews, record review, one-on-one testing, or some other types or combination of tests.

Evaluation Area

- ☐ **Academic Achievement** - These assessments measure reading, arithmetic, oral and written language skills, and/or general knowledge.
- ☐ **Health** - Health information and testing is gathered to determine how your child's health affects school performance
- ☐ **Intellectual Development** - These assessments measure how well your child thinks, remembers, and solves problems.
- ☐ **Language/Speech Communication Development** - These assessments measure your child's ability to understand and use language and speak clearly and appropriately.
- ☐ **Motor Development** - These assessments measure how well your child coordinates body movements in small and large muscle activities. Perceptual motor skills may also be measured.
- ☐ **Social Emotional/Behavior** - These assessments will indicate how your child feels about him/herself, gets along with others, takes care of personal needs at home, school and in the community.
- ☐ **Adaptive Behavior** - These assessments indicate how your child takes care of personal needs at home, school and in the community.
- ☐ **Post-Secondary Transition** - These assessments related to training, education, employment and where appropriate independent living skills.
- ☐ **Other**

Examiner Title

Special Education Teacher

School District Nurse

School Psychologist

Speech-Language Pathologist

Occupational Therapist; Physical Therapist

School Psychologist

School Psychologist

School Psychologist/Special Education Teacher

☒ **Alternative Means of Assessment** - (Describe alternative methods of assessing the child, if applicable)

All above assessors

Observations, Interviews, Review of Records

Parents / Guardians have protections under state and federal procedural safeguard provisions. Please refer to the enclosed NOTICE OF PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS for an explanation of these rights. If you would like further information about your rights or the proposed action and / or referral please contact:

Print Name of Contact

Position

Phone

E-mail Address

☐ consent to the assessment. I understand that the results will be kept confidential and that I will be invited to attend the IEP team meeting to discuss the results. I also understand that no special education services will be provided to my child without my written consent and that no individualized education program will result from the assessment without my consent, as required by EC Section 56321(b)(4).

☐ do not consent to the proposed assessment described above.

☐ I would like the following assessment information to be considered by the IEP team:

Signature _____

Date _____

☐ Parent ☐ Guardian ☐ Surrogate ☐ Adult Student

If my child is or may become eligible for public benefits (Medi-Cal): I authorize the LEA/District to release student information for the limited purpose of billing Medi-Cal/Medicaid and to access Medi-Cal: health insurance benefits for applicable services.

☐ Yes ☐ No



Referral Questions

- Does the child meet eligibility criteria for one of the 13 disabilities as defined by IDEA
- If yes, then does the child require specialized supports and instruction in order to gain educational benefit from the general education environment?

The answer must be **YES** to **BOTH** questions for student to be eligible for Special Education.



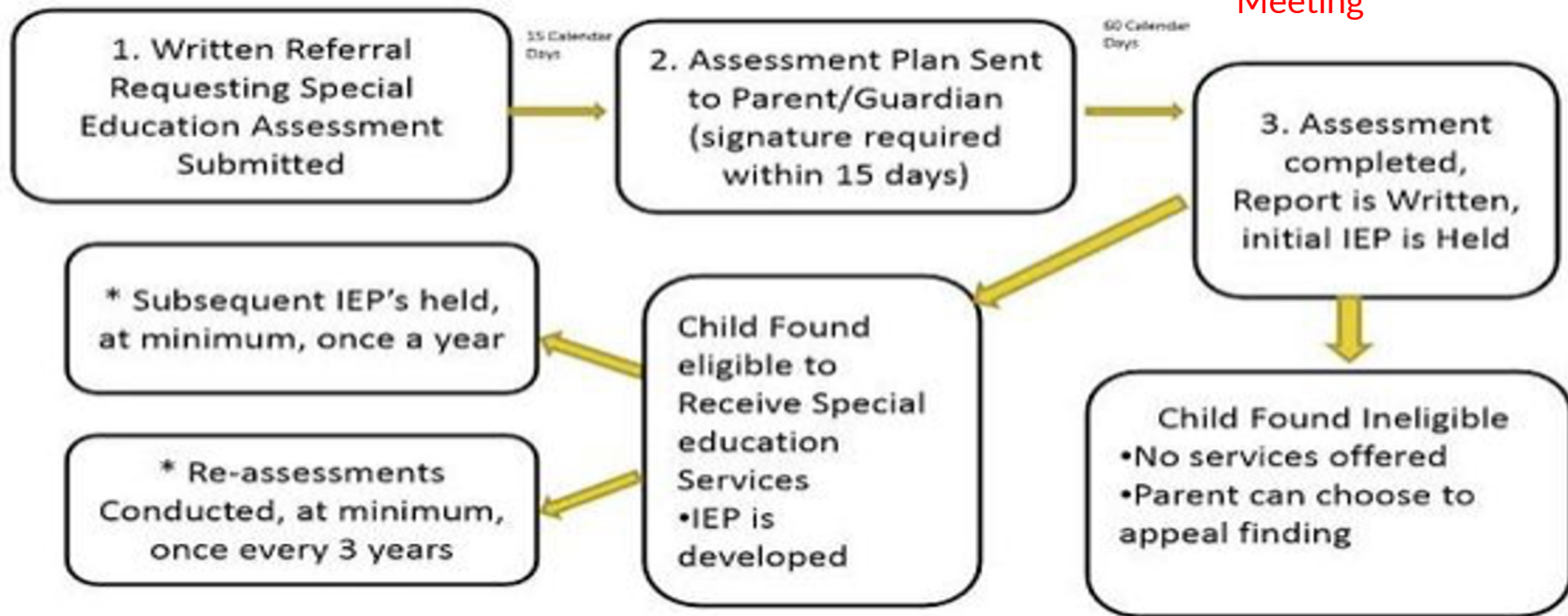
Timelines (Assessment)

- **15 Calendar Days** : Time between receipt of request for an assessment (verbal or written) and a formal response (assessment plan OR prior written notice).
- **60 Calendar Days** : Time between receipt of signed assessment plan indicating consent and when the assessment must be completed and IEP meeting held.
- **30 Calendar Days** : Time between a request for an IEP meeting and when the IEP meeting must be held (if the child already has an IEP).
- **3rd Birthdate**: Evaluation and IEP held for children transitioning from Early Start.

Timelines

15 Calendar Days
Allotted For District
to Send AP

60 Calendar Days
Required for
Assessment & IEP
Meeting



Break in Timelines

Assessment and IEP request timelines **stop** during school breaks of **MORE THAN 5** school days

This includes summer and winter breaks.



Understanding Assessment Results

WHAT ARE PRIMARY COGNITIVE PROCESSES?

Cognitive abilities transform sensory input into information we store and use. Primary cognitive processes include the following:



7 Areas of Cognitive / Thinking Skills

Crystallized Knowledge (Verbal Reasoning):

Depth and breadth of knowledge; general knowledge; verbal reasoning

Fluid Reasoning (Nonverbal Problem Solving):

Ability to solve novel problems using logic and reasoning

Visual-Spatial Processing: Ability to perceive, remember, and think with visual and spatial patterns of information

Short-Term Memory: Ability to hold information for short time and manipulate it

Long-Term Retrieval: Ability to learn information, store and retrieve it from long-term memory

Auditory/Phonological Processing: Ability to identify, isolate, blend, substitute, and analyze speech sounds

Processing Speed: Ability to perform simple and repetitive cognitive tasks quickly and efficiently

These skills are measured by standardized tests administered in a one-on-one setting with a school psychologist.

Additional Processing Skills

- **Sensorimotor Skills:** Ability to use ones eyes and hands in a coordinated and efficient way - visual and motor integration
- **Attention & Executive Functioning:** Ability to direct attention, keep it sustained over time, and switch from one mental task to another with efficiency
- **Orthographic Processing:** Ability to use the visual system to form, store, and recall words, as well as letter strings needed to recognize words



Other Assessment Areas on AP

Social/Emotional & Behavioral: Assessment of your ²³ child's social skills, emotional health, & behavior needs

Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living Skills: Assessment of how your child takes care of personal needs at home, school and in the community

Measured through: rating scales, questionnaires, interviews, observations, outside provider reports

Common terms in which rating scale results will be explained:

- Average, At-Risk, Clinically Significant
- Typical, Elevated, Very Elevated
- Average, Low, Very Low

* Always ask for clarification in the IEP meeting if you need help understanding the results

Other Assessments Areas on AP

Academic Achievement: Assessments that measure your child's mastery of core academic skills, i.e., reading, writing, math, spelling, etc.

- Standardized tests, work samples,

Post-Secondary / Transition: Assessments related to your child's future needs for education, career planning and independent living skills

- Questionnaires, career interest surveys, interviews with student

“Yes, and...”

Measures Beyond Test Scores

“In conducting the evaluation, the public agency must use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child, including information provided by the parent.”

Observations

Grades and Work Samples

Interviews

Curriculum-Based Assessments

Rating Scales

Standardized Test Scores

“Yes, and...”

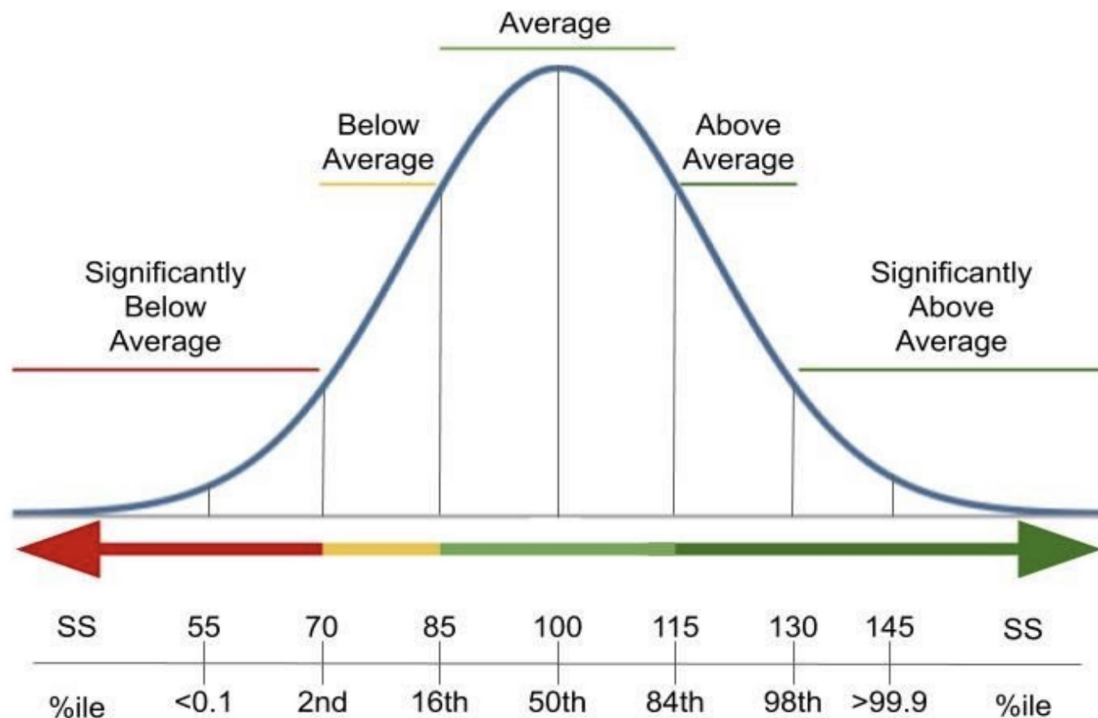
Measures Beyond Test Scores

“My independent therapist and medical team have provided me with reports; should I share them with the school team?”

ABSOLUTELY!!!

The Bell Curve: What do these scores mean?

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Standard Scores:

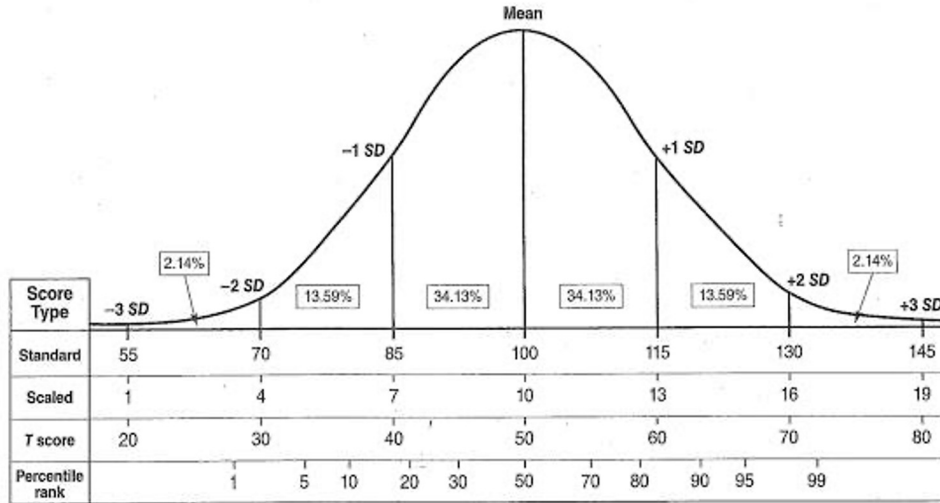
The mean is 100 and is “perfectly average” - everything +/- 15 points is also in the average range. Standard scores are widely used in special education evaluations.

Percentile Ranks: These scores tell you what percentage of the sample scored equal to or less than your child's score, i.e., if your child's percentile rank was 50, they scored as well as or better than 50% of the sample population.

How do we determine eligibility?

Understanding THE BELL CURVE

Interpretation of Evaluation Results



Important Concepts:

- Mean
- Average
- Standard Deviation
- Percentile

REMEMBER:

A STANDARD SCORE OF 100 = 50TH PERCENTILE, OR PERFECTLY AVERAGE

Still have questions?

- What specific assessments are being performed, and what will they measure?
- Are *all* areas of concern being addressed by the assessments?
- Are the assessments normed (ethnically/racially) for the student?
- Is the student being tested in their native/first language?
- Does the student have the appropriate language, verbal skills, and attention span to participate in the testing process?

What if a student was assessed and did not qualify?

What are next steps?

- Continue with Coordinated Care Team (CCT) process to assign supports and interventions, if warranted
- Consult with SLP/School Psychologist (assessment findings can inform next steps)
- Parents may consider requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)

What if a student was assessed and did not qualify?

Are they eligible for a 504?

- Not necessarily.
- Team must consult with 504 coordinator at your school site and refer back to the Section 504 eligibility criteria.
- Does the student have a physical or mental impairment that affects a major life activity?
- More 504 info - [www. sfusd.edu/Section504](http://www.sfusd.edu/Section504)

What if a student was assessed and did not qualify?

When can they be reassessed?

It depends...

- Do we have new information to consider?
- Examples: new diagnoses, further behavioral data collected through CCT process, recent outside assessment, crisis events

What about an IEE?

Independent Educational Evaluation: *"A parent has the right to an independent educational evaluation at public expense if the parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the public agency"*

[34 CFR 300.502]

- Pros: additional data from an independent specialist; sometimes more thorough
- Cons: time consuming; expensive; can delay implementation of IEP; doesn't always provide new information

Before Requesting an IEE



- Make every attempt to understand the data you have
- Collaborate with the team to ask and answer questions
- Do you know how the data you have will impact your child in the classroom?
- Think about your goal: can the team help you reach it without additional data?

Where can I learn more?

- Google, a parent's BFF
- Support for Families: support groups, information pamphlets, parent mentors, and more
- Understood.org: very family-friendly resource!
- SFUSD's Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (www.cacspedsf.com)
- Internet-based support groups (i.e. Bay Area Autism Network, SIKidSF)
- And of course...

When in doubt, consult with your child's special education team:

- Special Education Teacher/IEP Case Manager
- School Psychologist
- Speech Language Pathologist
- Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist
- Classroom / General Education Teacher(s)
- Principal / Administrator

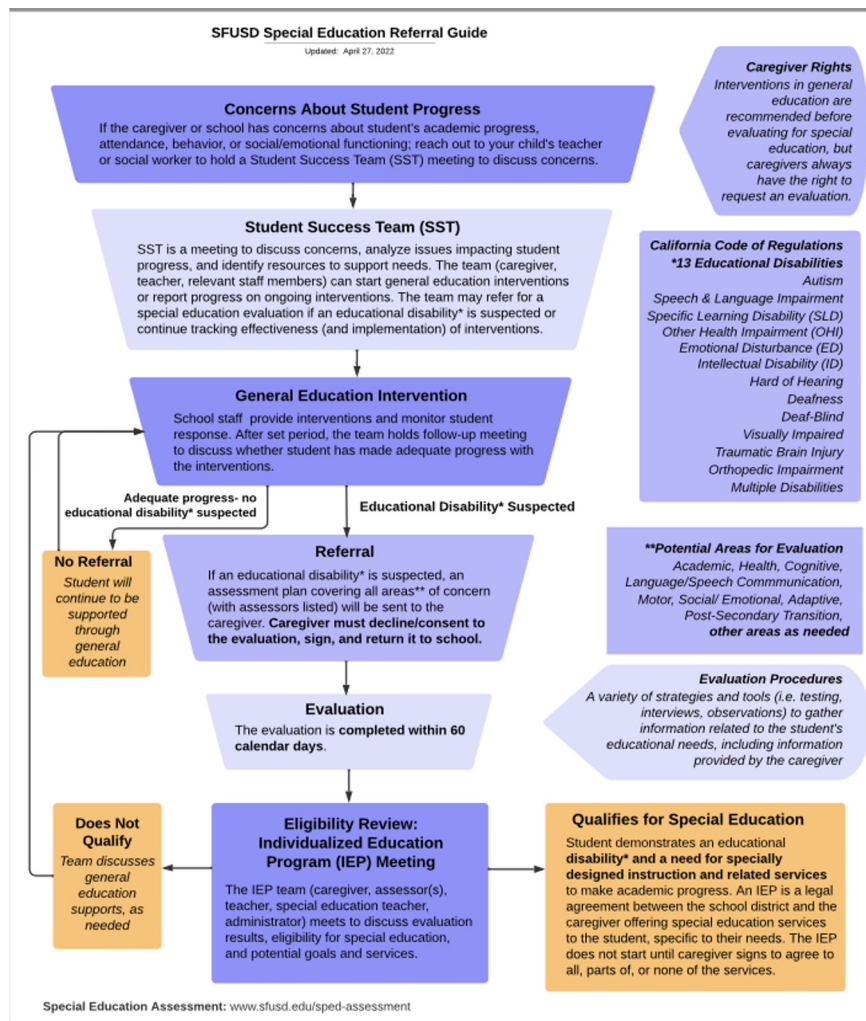
Resources for “Going Deeper”

- Wrightslaw website: <https://www.wrightslaw.com>
- Wrightslaw Tests and Measurements for the Parent, Teacher, Advocate & Attorney:
https://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/tests_measurements.html
- Disability Rights CA and CASE’s Special Education Rights and Responsibilities (SERR) Manual: <https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/publications/serr-special-education-rights-and-responsibilities>
- SERR Chapter 2 (Assessments):
<https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/system/files/file-attachments/504001Ch02.pdf>

Appendix & Resources

SFUSD Special Education Referral Guide

More information can be found here:
[SFUSD SPED Handbook](#)



Interventions in the general education setting are usually recommended by the school team, but **families do not have to wait for an evaluation** while their students receive general education interventions.

SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



Preschool Special Education Referral from Parents/ Community

- Completion of ECSE Preschool Parent/Caregiver Questionnaire to provide more information about the child and the concerns in the home and preschool setting if child is enrolled in a program.
- One valid proof of SF residency.
- Completed packet of information and documents to be sent to SFUSD Preschool Intake Unit

Federal and CA Education Code: Special Education Eligibility Criteria

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

Federal Definition

Per IDEA, the term “specific learning disability” means a disorder in one or more of the **basic psychological processes** involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written; the disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

Exclusionary Factors

Exclusionary factors include:

visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, limited English proficiency, limited school experience, poor school attendance or lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math.

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

SFUSD

Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)

- Identified deficit in an area of academic achievement
- Identified deficit in an area of cognitive processing
- Cognitive functioning is otherwise average
- Exclusionary factors not the primary impacting factor
- Determine research-based consistency between the cognitive and academic weaknesses
- Must require special ed to benefit from education

What about Dyslexia?

- Student must meet criteria under IDEA and California Ed Code
- Processing deficits may include auditory processing, long-term retrieval or orthographic processing
- Must require special ed to benefit from education
- Some students may have dyslexia and do not require special education

Other Health Impairment (OHI)

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:

(A) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, ADHD, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome, etc.

and

(B) Adversely affects a child's educational performance

Other Health Impairment (OHI) and ADHD

- By CA law, an ADHD diagnosis from a medical provider is not required to consider OHI eligibility.
- Best practice suggests that we consult with a medical provider.
- School psychologists can determine that a student demonstrates symptoms consistent with ADHD in order to make an educational recommendation.

Other Health Impairment (OHI) and ADHD

Schools cannot say:

“You have to go to your pediatrician to share these concerns.”

Instead, they could ask you:

- Have you consulted with your pediatrician?
- At your child's next check-up you are welcome to share
- If you share this with your child's pediatrician, it would be great if you could share with us what you discuss/learn.

Other Health Impairment (OHI) and ADHD

However, an ADHD diagnosis does not automatically mean student is eligible for special education services

School psychologists follow a structured protocol:

- Rating scales, observations, direct testing, interviews
- Response to behavioral interventions from general education.
- Rule out of confounding factors such as other cognitive, developmental, medical, environmental, or mental health concerns.

Emotional Disturbance (ED)

A student must exhibit **one or more** of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, adversely affecting educational performance and not solely the result of social maladjustment:

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- An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors,
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers,
- Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances exhibited in several situations,
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression and
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Emotional Disability* (legally known as Emotional Disturbance)

- Pervasive
 - Long-term (*usually more than 6 months*)
 - Across multiple settings (including school)
 - Adversely impacts child's education
-
- In SFUSD, we have adjusted our practice of calling *Emotional Disturbance* an *Emotional Disability* in our assessment reports instead. Federal law and IEP paperwork still requires us to use "Emotional Disturbance."

A developmental disability significantly affecting **verbal and nonverbal communication** and **social interaction**, generally evident before age three, and adversely affecting a child's educational performance.

Autism

May include the following characteristics:

- Engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements
- Resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines
- Unusual responses to sensory experiences

Initial evaluations include Speech and Language Pathologist

Intellectual Disability

- Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning,
- existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period
- adversely affects a child's educational performance.