



# What's the Big IDEA? #7

*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. This series is designed to offer information about IDEA as amended in 2004. Each fact sheet will focus on a different aspect of IDEA.*

## Evaluations

How does a child qualify to receive special education services? There are several steps to follow and one of the first is a complete evaluation done by a qualified educational diagnostician or school psychologist. The school must conduct an evaluation to determine:

- 1) if the child has a disability and
- 2) the educational needs of the child

A good evaluation provides valuable information that will help you and other members of the IEP team develop an appropriate Individualized Education Program (IEP) for your child. IDEA sets forth numerous regulations for non-discriminatory evaluations that must be followed. These regulations govern timelines; the qualifications of the examiner; the types of assessments that are used; evaluation procedures; and the content and use of the evaluation. In this fact sheet we will highlight just a few of the many requirements.



1. The evaluator must obtain information from many different sources – family, teachers, observations, work samples, as well as formal tests. For formal assessments, the evaluator must use more than one test. Every child with a disability has unique needs. In order to determine the specialized instruction needed for the child, it is important to tailor the evaluation(s) to the child. The evaluator needs to get a complete picture of your child. One test, like taking one profile shot of your child, will not provide a complete picture. In addition, you, the parent can provide diagnostic information from independent evaluators that **must** be considered.
2. A child whose dominant language is other than English must be tested in that language unless it is impossible to do so. So, a Spanish speaker must be tested in Spanish or bilingually. A child can not be found to have a disability if culture or language is the cause of his/her academic difficulties.
3. The child must be 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. When the Student Assistance Team (SAT) is making a referral for testing, this team should note all problem areas. Each of those areas needs to be assessed during the formal evaluation. If the school has noted difficulties with both academic performance and behavior, both of those areas need to be evaluated. You should not be told that an area won't be evaluated because it isn't part of the suspected disability.

4. If your child is non-verbal, the evaluator must choose tests that are designed to measure the aptitude (what your child should be able to do) or achievement (what he/she is actually doing) of students who are non-verbal. The test should not just give you the information that your child is non-verbal – you already know that!
5. The tests need to be thorough enough to identify all of your child's special education and related service needs, even if they are not commonly linked with your child's disability. For example, your child may have a specific learning disability, which is not commonly linked to a need for physical therapy. However, if motor problems are suspected, an evaluation must be done and services provided if the qualifications are met.



When the evaluator has completed testing, he or she writes a report. Because the report is very detailed and may contain confusing terminology, you may want to ask the evaluator to meet privately with you to review the report and answer any questions you may have.

### ***What should you find in a good evaluation?***

A good evaluation should have all of the following elements:

- Background – the student's educational, social, family history/background, and the difficulties that led to a referral for evaluation.
- Description of the evaluations used, what they measure, and how the scores are reported.
- Report of how the student responded to testing. Was rapport established between the student and the evaluator? Are the scores valid based on the evaluator's observations?
- Scores with the diagnostician's interpretation (graphs are always helpful).
- Conclusions/educational recommendations.
- Finally, the evaluator will note if the student does/does not meet the criteria for particular eligibilities that are being considered. In order for a student to be eligible for special education services, he or she must have a disability as defined by the regulations **and** have a need for services. However, ***the evaluator does not decide whether or not the student qualifies for special education services. That decision is made by the Eligibility Determination Team – which includes you, the parent.***

***No single person, no single test makes the decision regarding a student.***

For more information about evaluations, we invite you to contact Parents Reaching Out at 505-247-0192 or 1-800-524-5176. In addition to our website – [www.parentsreachingout.org](http://www.parentsreachingout.org) – here are two other websites with excellent information:

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>

<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/SEB/technical/NMTeamManual.pdf>

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