

Step 2: Evaluation

Once the Consent to Evaluate form is signed, the team has 60 days to complete the necessary evaluations and make an eligibility determination.

Depending on the concerns present, evaluations may include:

- Psychological, educational, or behavioral evaluations
- Parent, student, and/or teacher interviews
- Evaluations for speech and language processing, fine motor abilities, or other areas that may need related services at school

Depending on the evaluation type, it may be conducted by a psychologist, specialist, school social worker, counselor, or other qualified professional.

Step 1: Referral

The special education eligibility process starts when a person familiar with the child makes a written or verbal request (referral) for special education services. Referrals may come from parents, teachers, or other people familiar with the child like daycare staff members, physicians, or psychologists. Once a referral is made, the team who received the referral has 30 days to hold a meeting (which includes the parent) to review the child's current data (AED Meeting). Proceeding with evaluation is a team decision specific to the child. If the team does agree to proceed, they must obtain written consent to evaluate the child from a parent or guardian.

Step 3: Eligibility Determination

Once the evaluations are complete, the team will meet again to determine eligibility. At the meeting, each evaluator will share their findings. The team will then discuss whether the student meets the criteria for special education eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

If the student is found **ineligible**, the team may discuss other ways to support the student's needs outside of special education (for example, tutoring, counseling, academic intervention, a Behavior Intervention Plan, or a 504 plan).

If the student is found **eligible**, the team has 30 days to develop and implement an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Step 4: IEP Development

Finally, the team will collaborate to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which outlines the services the student needs in order to have access and make progress in school. The IEP includes the student's disability category, present performance levels, baseline data and goals for the coming year, service settings and location(s), classroom and testing accommodations, and other services where applicable (like dedicated aides or transportation).

(Please note that the Eligibility Determination and IEP Development are often combined into the same meeting.)

Visit us at specialeducation.dc.gov for additional resources, information on what comes next, answers to your frequently asked questions, and more!








I think my child may need special education services, but where do I start?

Have more questions about special education in DC? We can help!

The Special Education Eligibility Process: Family Roadmap



If your child is...	Special education referrals are made through...
Ages 3-5 and enrolled in a DC private or religious school, or is not yet enrolled in school	Early Stages referral@earllystages.org (202) 698-8037
Ages 3-21 and enrolled in a DCPS school or DC public charter school	Your child's school
Ages 5 and 10 months to 21 who are enrolled by their parent in a DC private or religious school, live in DC and attend a private or religious school outside of DC, or are home schooled in DC	Centralized IEP Support dcps.childfind@k12.dc.gov (202) 442-5475

-  (202) 671-2890
-  specialeducation@dc.gov
-  specialeducation.dc.gov
-  @dcspedhub
-  @specialeducationdc

