



REFERRAL PROCESS

Eligibility Determination

Although preschool-aged students may be determined to be eligible in any disability categories, the most common is Significantly Developmentally Delayed (SDD) [See 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(b)]. A young child is eligible for special education and related services in the SDD category when team members agree that the evaluation information indicates the child meets the eligibility criteria in one or more areas of development mentioned in the eligibility criteria section. Additionally, the team must agree that special education and related services are required for the child to learn and be part of an appropriate educational setting. The SDD eligibility may be used for children from ages 3-9. However, the initial eligibility must be established and an IEP in place on or before the child's 7th birthday. Eligibility can continue to the end of the school year in which the child turns 9, if the child is not reevaluated and found eligible in another disability category prior to the end of the school year. As with all children eligible under the IDEA, the IEP Team shall reevaluate the child no later than 3 years from the date of initial eligibility.

Referrals from Babies Can't Wait (BCW)

BCW coordinates with the CCSD to facilitate the referral process through a transition conference. A parent must consent to allow BCW to contact the CCSD. Children being referred from BCW are children with disabilities who:

- are approaching the age of three
- are transitioning from BCW
- have an Individualized Family Service Program (IFSP)
- are identified as being potentially eligible for preschool special education services

Babies Can't Wait Transition Conferences

The transition conference will be held as early as nine months but no later than 90 days prior to the child's 3rd birthday. The CCSD preschool special education coordinator and BCW service coordinators must develop procedures for the transition conference. Transition conferences held without notification to the CCSD are not compliant.

The parent, BCW coordinator, CCSD preschool special education coordinator, and other persons as appropriate attend the conference and serve as the transition team. The transition team reviews the IFSP and other documents that pertain to the child's disability. At this meeting, the CCSD preschool special education coordinator obtains medical and developmental history and schedules the child's comprehensive evaluation. After obtaining parental consent, the CCSD preschool evaluation team conducts a comprehensive evaluation. The parent, BCW

coordinator, regular early childhood provider (as appropriate), and preschool special education coordinator will participate in the eligibility determination meeting and develop an IEP if the student is found eligible. The CCSD will implement the IEP on or before the child's 3rd birthday.

Referrals from Parents or Early Regular Childhood Provider

Children suspected of having a disability who are not receiving special education services and supports from the CCSD may be referred by parents, childcare providers, early regular childhood providers, or other individuals.

Components of the Referral Process

The CCSD Special Education Coordinator obtains the parent's written consent to conduct a comprehensive evaluation. The evaluation team conducts a comprehensive evaluation within 60 days of receipt of written consent. The team will informally and formally assess all areas related to any suspected disability, including, if appropriate, vision and hearing, health, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities. The team will review early childhood data from evidence-based interventions and progress monitoring implemented prior to referral and provided by referring party, if available. For any student being considered for a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), research and or evidence based interventions are a required component of the comprehensive evaluation. While the interventions should occur prior to the referral for evaluation, it is possible for the interventions to be completely concurrently with the evaluation. If appropriate, the team identifies and continues to implement additional early childhood evidence-based interventions and progress monitoring during the evaluation process.

Screenings used to determine educational strategies are not considered part of the formal evaluation data.

The parent, regular early childhood provider (as appropriate), special education early childhood provider, and evaluation team participate in the eligibility determination meeting and IEP development. The CCSD will implement the IEP as soon as possible following the development of the IEP.

Role of Parents in the Eligibility Determination, IEP Development, and Placement/LRE Decision-Making Process

Parents should be involved in all the decision making for their child. This involvement includes:

- giving written consent to allow Part C Babies Can't Wait or other programs or providers to share the child's records with the CCSD
- voicing educational concerns, desires, and goals for the child
- giving written consent for a comprehensive evaluation
- actively participating in the eligibility meeting
- actively participating in the development of the child's program (IEP) for special education services and/or related services
- giving written consent for the initial provision of special education and related services.

Role of the Regular Early Childhood Provider or Teacher in Eligibility Determination, IEP Development, and Placement/LRE Decision-Making Process

The role of the regular education teacher is to assist in determining appropriate positive

behavioral interventions, educational supports, and strategies; and to assist in making the determination of supplementary aids and services, program modifications, and support for school personnel. If the child is, or may be, attending a school-based preschool program, the school will invite the preschool teacher. The regular education preschool teacher from the preschool program is required to attend the IEP Team meeting unless the parent provides written consent to excuse the teacher from the IEP Team meeting. If the preschool age child is attending and/or receiving special education services in a community based preschool program, daycare, or early childhood program (GA Pre-K or Head Start), the CCSD will invite the teacher of the preschool program to attend the IEP Team meeting. The CCSD should try several different ways to encourage the attendance of the teacher. The school can hold the IEP Team meeting without the community-based preschool teacher, but should be able to show that they invited the teacher and the teacher did not attend. As a best practice, a regular education preschool teacher from the CCSD should attend the IEP Team meeting especially if the teacher from the preschool program is unable to attend.

Specific Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

Parent

- Identify concerns about their child's development.
- Discuss concerns with caregiver or teacher.
- Contact the CCSD for assistance and/or referral.
- Implement, in coordination with CCSD, regular early childhood evidence-based interventions as deemed appropriate with the support and direction of the early childhood provider or teacher.
- Monitor and document progress or lack thereof from the implementation of early childhood evidence-based interventions.

Daycare/Head Start/Private Preschool/GA Pre-K Provider

- Identify and document concerns about a child's development, including documenting information from universal screenings
- Discuss concerns with parents.
- Identify and implement in coordination with the CCSD, early childhood evidence-based interventions as deemed appropriate.
- Monitor and document progress or lack thereof from the implementation of early childhood evidence-based interventions.
- Contact the CCSD for assistance and/or referral.

CCSD as the Local Education Agency

- Use the Child Find process to identify young children who are suspected of having a disability.
- Identify, implement, and/or monitor appropriate, early childhood evidence-based interventions in coordination with parents and/or early childhood provider for children.
- Accept and process referrals of young children.
- Conduct comprehensive evaluations on all initial referrals.
- Assist in determining eligibility and appropriate special education services and supports.
- Offer and provide special education services and supports.
- Educate young children with disabilities under the framework of the Department of

Early Care and Learning (DECAL)/Bright from the Start Pre-K content standards and Georgia Early Learning Development Standards (GELDS), which have been aligned with the GaDOE Georgia Standards for Kindergarten.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Special education services and supports for young children should be provided in the “least restrictive environment,” which means that to the maximum extent appropriate, the young child should receive special education services in regular early childhood settings with other children of the same age who do not have disabilities. Young children with disabilities in Georgia may receive their special education services in a variety of environments and the full continuum of services must be made available. The child’s IEP Team will discuss the individual child’s needs and determine the type of services, supports, and setting(s) that are appropriate to address those needs.

Service Delivery Models for LRE

Regular early childhood setting (over 50% of children are children without disabilities). Regular early childhood settings for young children include the following:

- Georgia Pre-K
- Head Start or Early Head Start
- Child care facilities
- Private or church preschools (that may or may not meet the definition of a private elementary school)
- Homes of child care providers
- Special education early childhood setting (over 50% of children are children with disabilities). • Home (home of child)
- Service provider location (e.g., location of a person providing speech, occupational, physical, audiological, or other related services).
- Separate school (school for children with disabilities)
- Residential setting (e.g., state school for children with disabilities where they live on the premises, such as GA School for the Deaf)

Service delivery models for young children ages 3-5 years are typically provided on either a full-time or part-time basis.

- Full-time is based on the typical amount of full day preschool and/or day care (6.5 hours).
- Part-time is based on the typical amount of half-day preschool and/or day care (less than 4 hours).

Regular early childhood setting for the school-aged child (ages 5-9) takes place in his/her regular education setting, (e.g., kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third grade). In this setting, special education services and supports are provided either in the regular education setting or in a special education setting. The child’s IEP Team will discuss the individual child’s needs and determine the type of services, supports, and setting(s) that are appropriate to address those needs.

Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten

Children are eligible for kindergarten when they reach 5 years of age by September 1st. The kindergarten classroom provides the least restrictive or most natural environment for the child

and allows him or her to be with same age peers. The year before the child's 5th birthday, the IEP Team should meet to discuss the child's development and to determine how the child can be part of the kindergarten classroom. The kindergarten teacher should be invited to these meetings so that he or she can get to know the child and be ready for the child to be a part of the kindergarten program.

1.4 Evaluations and Reevaluations: State Rule: [160-4-7-.04](#)

Definition

Eligibility determination for special education services occurs only when a student's response to both core instruction and supplemental interventions does not result in movement toward achieving benchmarks resulting in grade level performance. Likewise, a student may be considered for special education if the individual response to intensive interventions produces meaningful growth, but that growth requires significant and ongoing resources to maintain.

Compliance Monitoring Protocols

When a referral for special education evaluation is made, a multidisciplinary team will conduct a comprehensive evaluation. This team may consist of the CCSD's psychologist, educational diagnostician, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist and/or physical therapist, parents, and others deemed as appropriate to the evaluation. The team is responsible for assessing the student in all areas related to any suspected disability and in any other areas deemed relevant. The parents will be asked to provide input during the evaluation process. Their information is valuable in developing the total picture of the child. General education teachers and teachers of special education are also a part of the eligibility determination team and are considered qualified professionals as well. School psychologists will work directly with Information Support (Compliance) Specialist to ensure compliance with GADOE and USDOE rules for evaluations and reevaluations. School psychologists send out weekly status updates to team members regarding timelines. Coordinators review timelines in GO and provide building administrators with these updates.

Professional Learning

School psychologists will participate in ongoing professional learning during monthly department meetings. School psychologists will then re-deliver applicable professional learning to special education colleagues and school-based colleagues. Team Leaders receive professional learning during regularly scheduled team leader meetings. To ensure all teachers and administrators are informed about their responsibilities, an annual update will be provided to all principals and team leaders. Speech-language pathologists participate in professional learning and have been provided guidance for evaluation reports.

Technical Assistance

School psychologists will collaborate with the Information Support (Compliance) Specialist and staff from District Information Support to ensure appropriate use of Georgia Online Individual Education Plan/Student Longitudinal Data System (GADOE/SLDS).

Initial evaluation referral process

The term “Initial Evaluation” refers to a formal evaluation that considers initial eligibility for special education services. Initial evaluation applies to:

- general education students with no history of special education
- general education students who previously received and were exited from special education including general education students whose parents revoked consent for the continued receipt of special education services
- all transfer students from other states who have a current out-of-state eligibility that does not support Georgia State eligibility requirements

Review of evaluation data and determination of need for additional data:

In the case of students transitioning from Babies Can’t Wait Services at age three (IDEA, Part C), or for students from out-of-state that have evaluation records available, as part of an initial evaluation, the combined members of the student’s IEP committee and the Eligibility Team shall review existing evaluation data. Based on that review and input from the student’s parent, the team must identify what additional data, if any, are needed. The group may conduct its review without a meeting.

Request for an Initial Evaluation Referral

If the parent requests an initial evaluation, either verbally or in writing, the CCSD staff must respond formally. A meeting should be held within ten days from receipt of this request. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the reasons parents feel an evaluation is necessary. The committee is responsible for determining if the CCSD will proceed with the evaluation. The committee should identify a note taker. This individual will record the discussion by taking minutes of the meeting. Based on this request, the CCSD may determine:

- an evaluation is warranted; if this decision is made then proceed with procedures for initial referral evaluation and continue with MTSS support as needed.
- an evaluation is NOT warranted or determines that interventions will be tried first. If this is the decision, a PWN, Prior Written Notice, must be completed and sent to parents within 10 days. If prior written notice is required, a copy of the minutes along with the parent request for evaluation should be sent immediately following the meeting to the Director of Special Education.

If a parent withdraws consent this should occur in writing. Screenings do not constitute an evaluation.

Parent Consent

The Clarke County School District must obtain a signed parent consent for evaluation. The CCSD will make reasonable efforts to obtain the informed consent from parents. To meet the reasonable efforts requirement, CCSD will document its attempts to obtain parental consent using procedures that may include detailed records of telephone calls made or attempted and the results of those calls, copies of correspondence sent to the parents and any responses received, and detailed records of visits made to the parent's home or place of employment and the results of those visits.

After consent is signed, the CCSD has 60 calendar days to complete the initial evaluation. The evaluation will be considered completed when the evaluation report(s) have been written. While the CCSD will work to share these results as close to the 60 days as possible, the CCSD is not required to make the eligibility determination during the 60 day initial evaluation timeline.

The 60-calendar-day time period begins when a CCSD employee receives the signed consent but excludes school holidays and other times when students are not in attendance for five or more consecutive school days, including the weekend days before and after the holiday period. Any summer vacation period when the majority of the CCSD teachers are not under contract does not count toward the 60-day time period. If consent is received 30 days or more before the end of the school year (defined as the teachers' last day under contract), the evaluation process must be completed within the 60-day time period. An exception to the 60-day time period occurs if the parent fails or refuses to produce the student for the evaluation, if extenuating circumstances exist (e.g., illness, unusual evaluation needs, or revocation of parental consent), or if the student moves to another LEA after the 60-day time period has begun.

If the parent refuses to give consent for the evaluation, the CCSD may, but is not required to, pursue the evaluation through mediation or a due process hearing. If the student is home-schooled or placed by the parents in a private school at their expense, the CCSD cannot use the mediation or due process hearing procedures to override the parents' refusal for evaluation.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team

When a referral for special education evaluation is made due to a concern that the student may have a disability and be in need of special education and related services, the comprehensive evaluation will be conducted by a multidisciplinary team. This team may consist of a psychologist, educational diagnostician, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, the student's teacher(s), and others as appropriate to the evaluation. The student's parents are considered members of this team. The student should be evaluated in any area that committee members have determined to be an area of weakness. The team is responsible for formally or informally assessing the student in all areas related to a suspected disability. Formal assessments may include standardized tests, criterion-referenced tests, and norm-referenced tests, and informal assessments may include teacher-made assessments, naturalistic observations, checklists, and interviews. The student's parents will be asked to

provide input during the evaluation process. Their information is valuable in developing the total picture of the student.

Comprehensive Evaluation

An initial evaluation needs to look at the needs of the whole student, regardless of the reason for the referral. In a comprehensive evaluation, the team will:

- informally and formally assess all areas related to any suspected disability, including, if appropriate, existing data, vision and hearing, health, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities
- use a variety of evaluation tools and strategies to gather relevant academic, functional, and developmental information about the student, including information provided by the parent
- not use any single procedure as the only criterion for determining whether a student is a student with a disability or for determining an appropriate educational program for the student
- use assessment techniques that may assess developmental, physical, intellectual, academic, communication, and social/emotional skills
- use evaluation tools and strategies to provide relevant information that will directly assist the eligibility team in determining the educational needs of the student
- use assessments and other evaluation materials to assess specific areas of educational need and not only those that are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient (IQ) score
- select assessment methods that, when administered to a student with impaired sensory, manual, or communication skills (to include English Learner (EL) barriers), the results accurately reflect the student's aptitude or achievement level and are not culturally biased.

Steps in the Evaluation Process

After a referral for special education evaluation and consent are obtained, the 60-calendar-day timeline begins. During this time, the following steps should occur as part of the evaluation process.

- Review all other data about a student, which include the permanent record, current classroom assessment and progress, results of any provided interventions, previous results of statewide assessments, attendance data, and disciplinary history.
- Conduct classroom observations in a setting in which the concern has been noted to determine current performance and to look for specific causes or reasons why the student is not learning or behaving at the expected levels.
- Interview current and previous teachers of the student. The focus of the interviews is to determine whether the concerns cited as the reason for the evaluation are new issues or recurring issues. In addition, the interviews will provide information on any interventions or strategies that may have been tried previously.

- Interview parents as part of the evaluation process. If the parents have any independent evaluations or medical information they have not provided to the CCSD, they are asked to provide the information to the CCSD. Information the parents have about learning at home, such as how long it takes the student to complete his or her homework and how much help the student requires, assists in the evaluation. Often the behavior of the student at home is also discussed to determine whether the parents see the same behaviors that the school sees, what kind of interventions work at home, and how frequently certain behaviors occur. In addition, many times the CCSD needs to screen for adaptive behavior, and it may ask questions about household chores or tasks, about money management, and about other things that do not always *feel educational* to the parent. This information contributes to the whole picture of the student.
- Review all previous information and data on the student (e.g., previous evaluations, medical reports, psychological evaluations, and independent evaluations). This helps the team determine which evaluations to administer for the current evaluation.
- Administer surveys or questionnaires. These are usually published forms of surveys or questionnaires that gather information about the typical day-to-day behavior of the student. The surveys or questionnaires are often completed by multiple people who know the student in order to provide a comprehensive view that encompasses school, home, and the community.
- Review information as data is received. The multidisciplinary evaluation team begins to review the information and determine what individual assessments are needed, and by whom, to provide more in-depth information. The needed assessments are then conducted and may include a variety of instruments that look at learning, listening, speaking, behavior, sensory, motor, and/or academics.
- Evaluate other areas of concern as they arise during the initial data-gathering phase. As these assessments are administered, other areas of concern may arise that need to be evaluated and additional assessments will be conducted as necessary. For example, fine motor skills may not have been a concern when the evaluation was requested; but information from the assessments and observations may indicate a concern that warrants an evaluation of the fine motor skills as a component of the comprehensive evaluation.
- Score and analyze results. All instruments are scored, and the results are analyzed and interpreted by the professionals who administered the instruments.
- Meet to discuss the evaluation results with the parent and educators, with accompanying evaluation report(s) at this time. This discussion could occur at the completion of the 60-day initial evaluation period or at the eligibility meeting, which as a matter of best practice, should occur within 10 calendar days of the completion of the initial evaluation.
- Conduct an eligibility meeting. The eligibility meeting determines whether a disability exists and what the impact is on the education of the student. If there is an adverse impact, the team may determine that the student is a student who needs special education and related services. Evaluation report(s) and an eligibility report are created regardless of whether the student is determined eligible or ineligible.

- Exclusionary factors are considered for each eligibility category. See Section 1.5 for specific exclusionary factors by eligibility.
- Evaluation results are entered into the SLDS Go IEP platform by the school psychologist and speech-language pathologist (when applicable).
- Parents receive a copy of the Eligibility Determination Report at no cost.

Development of the IEP is an ongoing process. As such, parents and/or teachers may call for another IEP meeting during the year as necessary and appropriate if there are any significant changes which may require alterations to the IEP.

Placement is fluid. As a child makes progress, services may need to change. If, at an IEP meeting, the IEP team determines that a child is not making progress in the current setting, a change may also be recommended.

Once the IEP determines placement, the child will begin to receive special education services.