Evaluations at a Glance

A practical introduction to school evaluations for families.

A Note for Families

An evaluation can feel like a big step, and the report that follows can be hard to read. This guide explains what an evaluation is, how it starts, and how to make sense of the results. It is a starting point, not a substitute for individualized guidance.

What Is an Evaluation?

An evaluation gathers information about how a child learns, using tests, observations, records, and input from families and educators. The school uses it to decide whether a student is eligible for special education and what supports they need.

> DEA PERSPECTIVE
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> **A good evaluation answers a question.**
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> Before testing begins, everyone should be clear on what the team is trying to learn. The best evaluations explain why a child is struggling, not just that they are.

How It Starts

Parents, educators, or the school team can request an evaluation. Put your request in writing and keep a copy. The school must give you written notice of its decision and get your written consent before an initial evaluation. Agreeing to an evaluation does not mean agreeing to services.

What an Evaluation May Look At

Cognitive	How your child reasons, remembers, and processes information.
Academic	Reading, writing, and math skills compared to same-age peers.
Communication	Speech, language, and how your child understands and uses words.
Social-Emotional	Behavior, attention, and how your child manages feelings and relationships.
Observation & Records	How your child does in class, plus grades, intervention data, and history.

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Reading the Results

Standard Scores	Many tests use 100 as the average, with roughly 85 to 115 considered the average range.
Percentiles	A score at the 40th percentile means your child scored as well as or better than 40 percent of same-age peers. It is not a percent correct.
Patterns	Look for gaps between areas. Strengths and weaknesses together often tell the real story.

If You Disagree

If you disagree with the school's evaluation, you can request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), completed by a qualified professional who does not work for the school, at no cost to you. The school must either pay for it or formally defend its own evaluation.

Common Misconceptions

MYTH	WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW
A low score means my child will qualify.	Eligibility depends on the full picture, including how the student is doing in class and whether they need specially designed instruction.
One test tells you everything.	No single score explains a child. Good evaluations combine several tools and sources of information.
If my child doesn't qualify, nothing else can be done.	Students who don't qualify may still benefit from interventions, a 504 Plan, or other supports.

Need Help Understanding an Evaluation?

Every child is different, and no guide can replace individualized support. If you would like help requesting an evaluation, reading a report, or preparing for an eligibility meeting, schedule a consultation with Distributed Education Advocacy.

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