

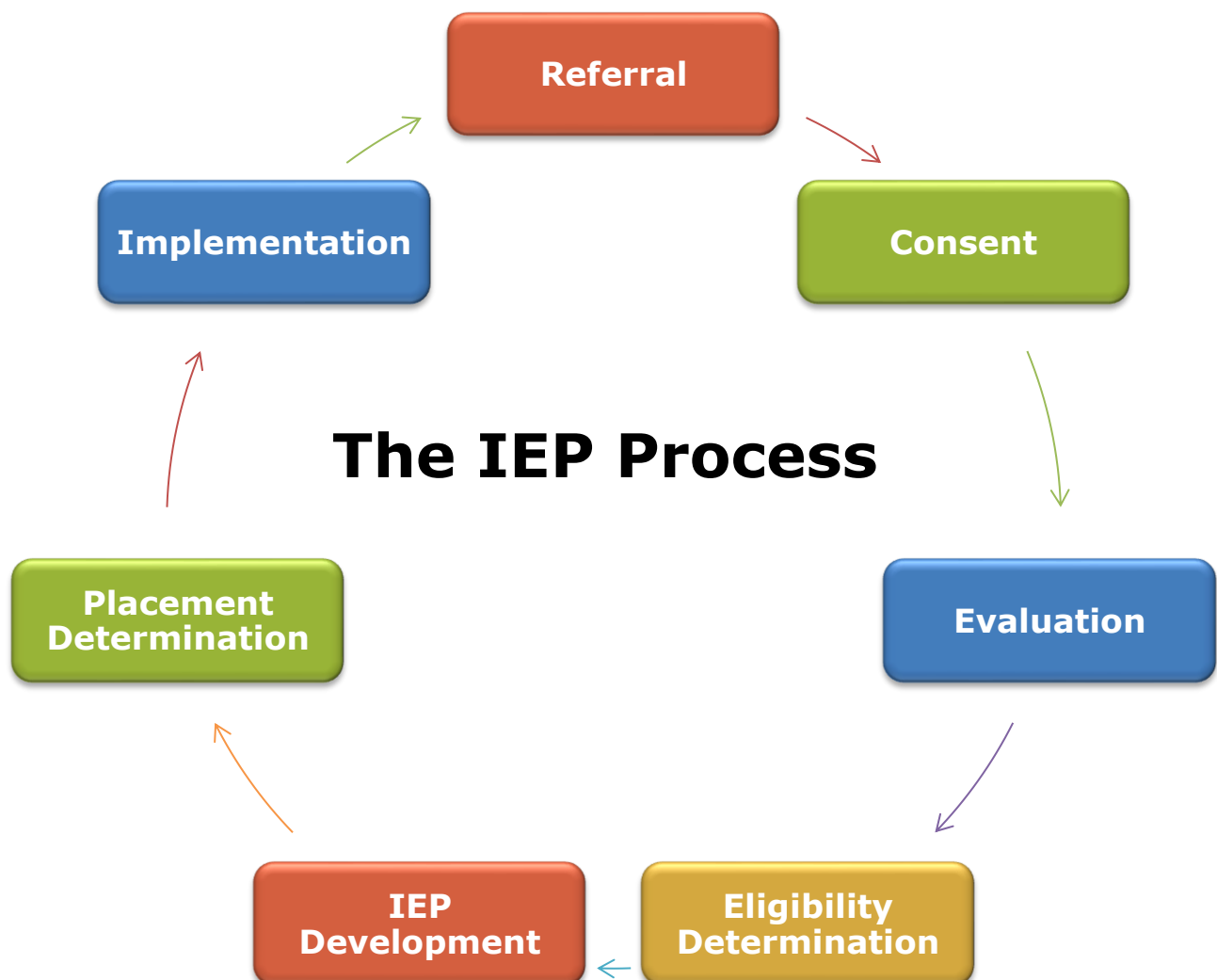


All About IEPs

If your child has a disability covered by special education law and is not making effective progress in school, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) can help level the playing field so that your child may succeed in school. So what is an IEP?

An IEP is a legally binding document designed to improve student outcomes. It lays out educational goals and defines the services and supports the school will provide in order to meet your child's unique needs. It also includes a plan for how your child's progress will be measured. Curriculums can be modified, accommodations can be put in place, and related services can be provided, but they must be written in the IEP in order to be enforced.

The IEP process, simply put, is the progression from referral to the school district for evaluation to eligibility determination, IEP development (if found eligible), placement, and finally implementation. When done right, the IEP process is the driving force for reaching improved outcomes for students with disabilities.





The IEP Process

Referral

The process begins when someone, such as your child's teacher, recognizes your child is struggling in school. They may suspect a learning disability or believe your child needs additional services to progress in school. A referral is then made to the school district for evaluation. As a parent or caregiver, you may also refer your child for an initial evaluation.

Consent

Once your child is referred to the school district for an evaluation, they have five school days to provide you with a written request for your consent to evaluate.

Evaluation

Evaluation is necessary to determine whether your child qualifies for special education. A variety of assessment tools, formal and informal, help provide a more complete picture of your child. After a thorough evaluation of all areas related to the suspected disability, the school must provide a report of your child's educational and developmental potential. It should summarize your child's needs and provide specific recommendations for meeting them.

If you would like a copy of the evaluation report, you will need to submit a request to the school district. Be aware, though, that the school is only required to give it to you two days before the team meeting.

If you disagree with an evaluation, you may request the school district to pay for an Independent Education Evaluation (IEE). You may have private evaluations done at any time, however, at personal expense.

Eligibility Determination

Once the evaluation is completed the team must determine whether your child is eligible for special education. In order to do that, the team must answer the following questions:

1. Does the student have a covered disability?
2. Is the student failing to progress in school?
3. Is the lack of progress a result of the disability? and
4. Does the student require either special instruction to make progress in school, or related services in order to access the general curriculum?



If the team is able to answer YES to all of the above questions, then your child qualifies for special education.

If your child is not determined to be eligible for an IEP, he or she may still qualify for a 504 Plan.

IEP Development

The IEP is a binding legal document, so it is important to craft a plan that supports your child, not a plan based around what the school has to offer. By law, certain elements must be included in every IEP:

- a vision statement,
- a description about how your child is currently doing in school (present level of performance),
- measurable annual goals, and
- the services to be provided, including how long, how often, and whether they'll be one-on-one or with a group.

Once developed, the IEP should address your parental concerns as well as the needs and specific recommendations identified in your child's evaluation.

Placement Decision

Placement is one of the final decisions in the IEP process. It refers to the appropriate class setting in which to implement the IEP. Every child is unique, and as such, all placements and services must be made on a case-by-case basis. Even children with similar diagnoses may require different levels or types of services. Placements could be in a general education classroom, a substantially separate classroom, or out-of-district.

Implementation

Once the IEP is written and accepted, the school district is responsible for implementing it immediately. Additionally, the school should deliver progress reports as frequently as general education report cards unless the IEP dictates they must be provided more often.