



Austin Independent School District

PARENT & CAREGIVER GUIDE TO EVALUATION



DISTRICT MANUAL 2024-2025

Austin ISD Vision

We are Austin's home for inclusive learning: high expectations for all children, high outcomes for every student. We prepare every student with the knowledge and skills to thrive in college, career, and life.

Commitment to the Identification, Evaluation, and Service of Students

In Austin ISD, we believe that every student is fundamentally a part of the general education community. We reinforce our dedication to inclusivity by offering a full continuum of services and supports, individually tailored to each student. Our Special Education Department and District resolutely commit to fostering high expectations and implementing robust systems to ensure equitable outcomes for all students with and suspected of a disability(ies). Every member of our staff is deeply invested and held accountable to ensure our children develop independence and are prepared for college, career, and life.

Recognizing the significance of fostering a collaborative community, we aim to cultivate a network of educators, parents, families, and community partners dedicated to creating an enriching learning environment for our students. In this endeavor, we commit to the identification, evaluation and service of all students in Austin ISD who require it.



DISCLAIMER

Austin Independent School District (“Austin ISD,” “AISD, ”or the “District”) is subject to the rules and regulations contained in all Governing Documents. Governing Documents shall include federal and state law, Board policy, Operating Procedures, and this Special Education Evaluation Manual. In the event of any inconsistencies or conflict between the Governing Documents, the following order of precedence shall apply:

- Federal law
- State law
- Board policy (including the Student Code of Conduct)
- Special Education Operating Procedures
- Evaluation Manual

The District reserves the right to modify provisions of the manual at any time when it deems necessary. The Parent & Caregiver Evaluation Manual was not developed for the purpose of creating a requirement that is not otherwise imposed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (“IDEA”), together with its implementing federal regulations, state statutes and rules, as they shall from time to time be amended, and shall not be construed to create a higher standard than that established by IDEA.



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Overview

Austin ISD serves over 73,000 students, with more than 12,000 eligible for special education services across our 116 diverse schools. In our district, all students are first and foremost general education students. Special education services, Section 504 accommodations, and supplementary aids are provided to support their learning needs in addition to the general education curriculum, not as a replacement.

Special education evaluations are a key part of making sure that students with unique learning needs receive the right support and services to help them succeed academically and grow personally. At Austin ISD, we are committed to assessing every student who might have a disability and ensuring that students already receiving special education services are evaluated regularly to provide the most effective support. This manual is designed as a guide for parents, guardians, and families to understand our evaluation processes. It explains how we assess students to determine their needs and how we use those assessments to ensure each child receives the support they need to thrive in our schools

Organization of the Manual

The manual provides an overview of the legal requirements, local procedures, responsibilities, and helpful resources that guide our special education evaluation process. As we continue to improve and update our practices, the manual will be updated to reflect any new changes. Throughout the manual, you'll find links to web pages, documents, and forms that offer more detailed information on each topic.

Special Education Contacts

Our district team emphasizes the importance of working together, sharing responsibility, and making decisions based on data to meet the needs of all our students. This helps ensure that we follow best practices and comply with regulations to provide the best possible support for AISD students receiving special education services.

Special Education Department		
Name	Position	Contact Email
Executive Leadership		
Dr. Dru McGovern-Robinett	Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Programs	dru.mcgovern-robinett@austinisd.org



Special Education Department

Name	Position	Contact Email
	<i>SPED, 504, Directly Overseeing Data Strategy & Budget</i>	
Dr. Cherry Lee	Executive Director of Instructional Delivery and Inclusion <i>Speech, Related Services, Instruction, Campus Support, Section 504, Transition</i>	cherry.lee@austinisd.org
Dr. Jennifer Baker	Executive Director of Compliance, Operations, Reporting, and Evaluations <i>Compliance, Evaluations, Records, Legal Cases, Operations, EdPlan System for SPED</i>	jennifer.m.baker@austinisd.org
Directors		
Amanda M. Reyes <i>(formerly Molina-Garza)</i>	Director of Evaluations <i>School Aged Evaluations, IEEs, Child Find Contact</i>	amanda.m.reyes@austinisd.org
Bailey Gates	Director of Related Services, Speech, and Instructional Delivery <i>Early Childhood Evaluations, Private School Evaluations, Related Services, Speech, Instruction</i>	bailey.gates@austinisd.org
Dr. Kimberley Pollard	Director of 504, Dyslexia, and	kimberley.pollard@austinisd.org



Special Education Department

Name	Position	Contact Email
	Transition Services <i>EdPlan 504 Systems, SPED Transition</i>	



1. Pre-Referral Process

Prior to referral, students experiencing difficulty in the general education classroom should be considered for all support services available to all students, such as:

- Evidence-based interventions
- Tutorials
- Remedial Support
- Compensatory Education or Services
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)*
- Accommodations under Section 504

Multi-tiered Systems of Support

Austin ISD uses a framework called Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to help all students succeed. This system helps prevent academic and behavioral challenges, provides early support when needed, and identifies students who may have disabilities. The MTSS framework involves many people, including campus administrators, teachers, counselors, parent support specialists, and other educational staff working together to support each student.

At Austin ISD, we focus on prevention and early intervention. We believe that by providing effective instruction and social-emotional learning in every classroom, along with targeted support when needed, we can significantly reduce the number of students struggling with reading, math, or behavior issues. While the MTSS process is designed to provide helpful interventions, it will never be used to delay or deny a full evaluation if a child is suspected of having a disability. A full individual and initial evaluation (FIIE) can happen at any point in the MTSS process if we suspect a child may need special education services

Child Find

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) is a federal law that has been in effect since 1975. IDEA requires public schools to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and to engage in a process known as [Child Find](#). Child Find is an ongoing process of public awareness, coordination with agencies and primary sources, and screening procedures to locate, identify, and evaluate all children with disabilities from birth through age 21 who may require early intervention or special education services. This process includes children who are:

- Enrolled in a public school and advancing from grade to grade
- Parentally placed in a private school, homeschool, or attend a virtual school
- Highly mobile, including migrant children



- Homeless
- In foster care or unaccompanied youth
- Wards of the state
- Involved in the criminal justice system
- Residing in nursing homes

[Child Find Flyer - English PDF](#); [Spanish PDF](#)

- Austin ISD [Family Empower Hour 2024-25 Calendar](#)
 - **Family Empower Hours** for the 2024-25 school year are hosted by the Austin ISD Department of Special Education. These sessions will include a variety of topics related to students with disabilities and special education, including Child Find.

2. Referral Process

Referral for Initial Evaluation

A request for an initial evaluation to determine if a student has a disability can be made by a parent, the school or district, a doctor, a community agency (like an Early Childhood Intervention program), or anyone else who has worked with the student. Once the school receives a request for an evaluation, they must, within 15 school days, provide the parent with a written notice explaining whether they agree to conduct the evaluation or not. If the school agrees to evaluate, they will also ask for your consent to proceed and provide you with important documents, including a Notice of Procedural Safeguards, an overview of the Special Education Process, and a guide to the ARD process. Each of these documents will be explained to you in detail.

Notice of Procedural Safeguards

A copy of the Notice of Procedural Safeguards must be given to the parent of a child with a disability or with a suspected disability:

- Upon referral or request for an initial evaluation of their child;
- Upon receipt of the first state complaint in a school year;
- Upon receipt of the first request for a due process hearing in a school year;
- On the day a decision is made to make a disciplinary change of placement; **AND**
- Upon the parent's request.

SPEDTex produces the [Notice of Procedural Safeguards](#) resource in over 30 different languages and also has an [Audio Version of Procedural Safeguards](#) available for parents/families. Click on the link and select which language you would like to download.



Overview of Special Education Process for Parents

The Overview of the Special Education Process is a summary of rights that must be given to the parent of a child with a disability or with a suspected disability:

- Upon referral or their request for an initial evaluation of their child;
- Upon receipt of the first state complaint in a school year;
- Upon receipt of the first request for a due process hearing in a school year;
- On the day a decision is made to make a disciplinary change of placement; **AND**
- Upon the parent's request.

TEA produces the [Overview of the Special Education Process for Parents](#) in 27 languages.

The Parent's Guide to the ARD Process

The Parent's Guide to the ARD Process is designed to give parents/families of children who are or may be eligible for special education and related services, a better understanding of the special education process, and their procedural rights and responsibilities so that they are able to fully participate in the decision-making process in their child's education. The Parent's Guide to the ARD Process must be given to the parent of a child with a disability or with a suspected disability:

- Upon referral or request for an initial evaluation of their child;
- Upon receipt of the first state complaint in a school year;
- Upon receipt of the first request for a due process hearing in a school year;
- On the day a decision is made to make a disciplinary change of placement; **AND**
- Upon the parent's request.

SPEDTex produces [A Parent's Guide to the ARD Process](#) resource in over 30 different languages. Click on the link and select which language you would like to download the PDF.

Informed Consent and Notice of Proposal to Evaluate

Informed consent means that before any evaluation or services are provided, everything will be clearly explained to you as the parent (or to the adult student). This way, you fully understand what is being proposed before you agree to it in writing. The written notice you receive before an evaluation begins is called the Notice of Proposal to Evaluate

Resources

- [Prior Written Notice Quick Guide](#)
- [Prior Written Notice – Legal Requirements and Best Practices \(video\)](#)
- [Informed Consent for Evaluation Quick Guide](#)



Parent Referral

The student's parent or legal guardian, school personnel, or another person involved in the education or care of the student can make a referral for special education.

Campus Referral

At Austin ISD, if a student is suspected of having a disability or is experiencing learning difficulties, they are referred to the campus Child Study Team (CST). This team meets every two weeks to review various data on the student's progress, including assessments, behavior, and attendance. The CST may decide that a referral for a special education or Section 504 evaluation is necessary.

Some situations that might lead to an evaluation include:

- Reviewing multiple data sources that together suggest the possibility of a disability and the need for special education services.
- A student not making the expected progress during interventions.
- A student requires more support as the curriculum becomes more challenging.
- Behavior issues or discipline referrals that interfere with learning.
- A parent providing an outside evaluation or diagnosis.
- Parental concerns about their child's struggles in school.
- The student receives outside therapeutic services or tutoring.
- A noticeable gap between the student's expected and actual academic growth.
- Chronic absenteeism.
- Section 504 services not fully addressing the student's needs.

These are just examples, and the CST considers the overall picture to decide if an evaluation is warranted.

Step 1: Meeting and Data Review

The Child Study Team (CST) meets to carefully review and analyze different types of student data, such as outside medical or psychological reports, previous school evaluations, parent concerns, teacher reports, grades, attendance, behavior records, and academic data like reading and math assessments. The CST also considers the student's home language and language of instruction. It's important to know that Austin ISD will not use the MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) process to delay any referrals or evaluations that might be needed.

Step 2: Decision Making

During the decision-making process, the Child Study Team (CST) meets again to review all the data they've collected and to see if the student has made progress. They focus on two key questions:

1. Is there reason to suspect that the student has a disability?



2. Is there reason to suspect that, because of the disability, the student needs special education and related services?

If the CST answers "yes" to both questions, they will refer the student for a full and individual initial evaluation (FIE).

Step 3: Prior Written Notice (PWN)

The campus must, not later than the **15th school day** after the date of receipt of request for evaluation, provide the parent with PWN, [Notice of Procedural Safeguards](#), the ARD Guide, and [TEA Overview of Special Education for Parents](#).

Private School Referral

Referrals for evaluation of students who are attending private school or being homeschooled are handled by a specialized team of evaluators called the Private Homeschool Evaluation Team (PHET). Parents of students attending private school or homeschool can request evaluation (for dyslexia and all other suspected disabilities) by completing the [Enrollment and Parent Information Form](#) and [School and Teacher Information Form](#). Parents and facilities may also email their requests to propshare@austinisd.org.

Once the evaluation is completed, the student's home campus within Austin ISD will be notified of the results and will need to hold the Initial ARD meeting within 30 days. If the student lives outside of the Austin ISD attendance boundaries, the address of the private school will be used to determine the appropriate campus to support the initial ARD meeting

Early Childhood Intervention Referral

In Austin ISD, the Early Childhood Evaluation Team (ECET) is responsible for supporting the evaluation process for children ages 0-5 who are not enrolled in Austin ISD but either live within district boundaries or attend a private school within those boundaries. Referrals can come from Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), parents, or community agencies. The ECET is overseen by Bailey Gates, Director of Instructional Delivery, Inclusion, and Related Services. For more information about early childhood referrals and evaluation services, you can contact her at bailey.gates@austinisd.org.

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Referral and Evaluation Process:

Eligibility for an evaluation is based on the following factors:

- Verification that the child either lives within the Austin ISD district boundaries or is enrolled in a PreK-Partnership, Head Start, or a private school within Austin ISD.
- The child must be at least 2 years and 9 months old to be eligible for an evaluation by the AISD Early Childhood Team.



If your child is not yet eligible for evaluation by the Early Childhood Team due to age, the district will reach out to you when your child is 90 days away from their third birthday to discuss the next steps in the school-based early childhood evaluation process.

If your child is not eligible to be evaluated by the Early Childhood Evaluation Team (ECET) for other reasons (such as age, living outside AISD boundaries, or already being enrolled in a district school), the district will:

- Provide you with information about the district where your family resides so you can request an evaluation there.
- If your child is 6 years old or older, lives within Austin ISD boundaries, and attends a private or homeschool, the Transition Specialist will pass the information on to the Private Homeschool Evaluation Team (PHET) Scheduler.
- If your child is 6 years old or older, lives within Austin ISD boundaries, but does not attend a private school or homeschool within those boundaries, the Transition Specialist will help you enroll your child in the school closest to your home. They will also notify the campus administrator and the school-aged evaluation supervisor for that campus.

Infants and Toddlers (Birth to Age 2)

Early intervention services are available for children from birth to age 3. If you need assistance, please call the HHS Office of the Ombudsman at 1-877-787-8999, choose your language, and then select Option 3. The Ombudsman staff will ask for your zip code, county, or city and provide you with the name and contact number of your local Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program. If you have a hearing impairment, you can use the relay option of your choice or dial 7-1-1 to connect with Relay Texas. As your child approaches their third birthday, a meeting will be held with Austin ISD and the ECI program, usually up to nine months before the third birthday, to help transition from ECI services to school services, Head Start, or other educational settings. During this meeting, the team will develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), which is tailored to the needs of your child and your family. Services are provided by an Early Intervention Specialist (EIS) and other service providers as outlined in the IFSP.

Child Referred and Placed Before Age 3

For children who are referred before age three and are receiving Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) support, special education services must be made available on their third birthday if they are found eligible. If appropriate, a meeting will be scheduled up to nine months before your child turns three to help your family transition from ECI services to special education services. It's important to note that not all children who receive ECI services will qualify for special education services.

Referral Process for Children Ages 3-5 Served Through Early Childhood Intervention

Austin ISD works with the [Texas Health and Human Services Commission \(THHSC\)](#) and local Early Intervention Agencies to inform parents or guardians about the Early Childhood Special Education



(ECSE) program for children in the district who are at least 3 years old but younger than 6. This program is for children who may be eligible for enrollment in Austin ISD's IDEA Part B ECSE program.

At least 90 days before a child with a disability under Part C turns three years old, the Early Intervention Agency must notify the district that the child is approaching the age where they may be eligible for preschool special education services under Part B.

If a child is referred before age three through an early intervention program and is receiving services through ECI, special education services must be made available on their third birthday if they are found eligible.

Additionally:

- A child who is three or four years old on or before September 1st and meets the district's pre-kindergarten requirements may enroll in the district's pre-kindergarten program.
- A child must be five years old on or before September 1st to enroll in the district's kindergarten program.

Referral Process for Children Ages 3-5 Not Served Through Early Childhood Intervention

Austin ISD provides specialized instruction and services to children ages 3 to 5 who have been identified with at least one disability as defined by TEA and who demonstrate a need for specialized instruction. Please complete the [Early Childhood Special Education Referral Information Form](#) or call 512-414-SPED (7733), and we will contact you regarding your child and your interest in early childhood special education services.

Resources

- [Special Education Referral for Initial Evaluation Quick Guide](#) (TEA, 2022)
- [Special Education Initial Referral Timeline](#) (TEA, 2022)
- [Legal Framework - Ages 0-5](#) (ESC 18)
- [Legal Framework - Children in Private Schools](#) (ESC 18)
- [Texas Health and Human Services Commission \(THHSC\): Early Intervention Services Early Intervention Services \(EIS\)](#)



3. Evaluations

Austin ISD is committed to providing thorough and well-rounded evaluations for all students who are referred. These evaluations help us understand a student's strengths and areas of need, guiding us in providing the right support. The evaluation process includes multiple assessments, gathering input from parents, teachers, and classroom observations, to ensure a complete picture of the student's abilities and challenges. Before a child can receive special education services for the first time, we must conduct a Full Individual and Initial Evaluation (FIIE) to determine if the child has a disability and qualifies for special education. This evaluation looks at the student's learning needs, strengths, interests, and challenges, and helps decide if specially designed instruction is necessary for their academic success.

To be eligible for special education services, a student must:

1. Have a disability as defined by one of the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) categories, and
2. Need special education services because of that disability.

Students with disabilities that are not covered by IDEA or who do not require special education services might still be eligible for support under Section 504, which provides accommodations to help them succeed in school.

Evaluation Guidelines

When conducting a student's Full Individual and Initial Evaluation (FIIE), Austin ISD will:

- Use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather important information about the student's functional, developmental, and academic abilities. This helps determine whether the student is eligible for special education services and guides the development of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Ensure that no single test or assessment is used as the only basis for determining eligibility.
- Use reliable and accurate assessment tools that consider cognitive, behavioral, physical, or developmental factors.
- Carefully select and administer assessments for students with sensory, manual, or speaking challenges to ensure that the results accurately reflect the student's abilities, rather than being affected by these challenges, unless those specific skills are the focus of the test.

The student will be evaluated in **all areas related to the suspected disabilities** to assess the student's eligibility for special education and related services and provide information in all of the following areas:

- Communication and language;



- Health, vision, hearing, and motor abilities;
- Sociological status;
- Behavior and emotional status,
- Cognitive abilities;
- Academic performance; **AND**
- Assistive technology needs

The assessment tools chosen for your child's evaluation will be carefully selected to match their suspected disabilities and individual needs. Austin ISD will also make sure that these assessments:

- Are chosen and given in a way that is not racially or culturally biased.
- Are provided in your child's native language or preferred mode of communication, in a way that gives the most accurate information about what your child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is not possible to do so.
- Are used for their intended purposes and are proven to be valid and reliable.
- Are administered by trained and knowledgeable staff, which could include a practitioner in training who is being supervised by a credentialed evaluator.
- Are given according to the instructions provided by the test's producer to ensure accuracy and fairness.

Disability Criteria

A student must be assessed under the IDEA in all areas of suspected disability. There are 14 areas of eligible disabilities under the IDEA. Student must be assessed and determined to be eligible in one or more of the following areas:

- Autism (AU)
- Deaf Blindness (DB)
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH)
- Emotional Disability (ED)*
- Intellectual Disability (ID)
- Multiple Disabilities (MD)
- Noncategorical Early Childhood (NCEC)**
- Developmental Delay (DD)***
- Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
- Other Health Impairment (OHI)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Speech or Language Impairment (SI)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Visual Impairment (VI)

*This term replaces the federal term "emotional disturbance" in accordance with the revised Commissioner of Education rules that became effective summer 2024.



**The eligibility category of noncategorical must no longer be used by any school district beginning with the 2025-2026 school year. Any eligible student who begins the 2025-2026 school year already identified as NCEC may maintain this eligibility category, if determined appropriate by the student's ARD committee, until the required re-evaluation before the age of six.

***New disability eligibility category beginning with the 2024-2025 school year in accordance with the revised Commissioner of Education rules that became effective summer 2024.

This section will provide a summary review for each of the 14 disability categories, the diagnostic criteria and resource links.

Autism (AU)

Disability Criteria

As defined by 34 CFR Part 300; 19 TAC Chapter 89

- Characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.
- Autism does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disability.

A student with Autism is one who has a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with Autism include engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

While the characteristics of Autism are generally evident before age 3, age 3 is not a cut-off point for IDEA eligibility. A student who manifests these characteristics after age 3 could be identified as having Autism if the student meets the other eligibility criteria. Students with pervasive developmental disorders are included under the disability category of Autism. A student **does not** meet the eligibility criteria for Autism if the student's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the student has an emotional disability.

Determination of whether a student meets criteria for autism cannot require that the student meet the medical diagnosis for autism; additionally, the absence of the "other" characteristics listed in the [federal regulations](#) don't automatically exclude a child from eligibility.

Resources

- [Autism Society of America](#)
- [Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#)
- [Autism Spectrum Disorder Fact Sheet](#)
- [Learn the Signs! Act Early](#)
- [National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)
- [Texas Autism Research and Resource Center \(TARRC\)](#)
- [Texas Health and Human Services Autism Program](#)



Deaf-Blindness (DB)

Disability Criteria

In Texas, a student may meet the criteria as a student with deaf-blindness in any of the following four ways:

- Meets the disability criteria for Deaf and Visual Impairment.
- Meets the disability criteria for a student with a Visual Impairment and has a suspected hearing loss that cannot be demonstrated conclusively, but a speech/language therapist, a certified speech and language therapist, or a licensed speech-language pathologist indicates there is no speech at an age when speech would normally be expected.
- Has documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for auditory impairment or visual impairment, but the combination of such losses adversely affects the student's educational performance.
- Has a documented medical diagnosis of a progressive medical condition that will result in concomitant hearing and visual losses that, without special education intervention, will adversely affect the student's educational performance.

Meeting disability criteria one of these ways **requires both hearing and vision professionals** to attend ARD/IEP committee meetings.

Resources

- [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Eligibility for SPED](#) - Texas Sensory Support Network
- [Students with Visual Impairments: Eligibility for SPED](#) - Texas Sensory Support Network
- [American Sign Language Dictionary](#)
- [American Society for Deaf Children](#)
- [Better Hearing Institute](#)
- [Described and Captioned Media Program](#)
- [Hearing Loss in Children \(CDC\)](#)
- [National Association of the Deaf \(NAD\)](#)
- [National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management \(NCHAM\)](#)
- [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#)
- [Region 11 ESC - State Lead for Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Texas Deaf Ed](#)
- [Texas Deaf/Hard of Hearing \(DHH\) Services](#)
- [Texas School for the Deaf](#)
- [American Association of the Deaf-Blind](#)
- [Center for Parent Information and Resources](#) (Deaf-Blindness)
- [Deafblind International](#)
- [Helen Keller National Center for the Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults \(HKNC\)](#)
- [National Center on Deaf-Blindness](#)



Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH)

Disability Criteria

A student who is deaf or hard of hearing is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for deafness or for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Deafness means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the student is impaired with processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects the student's educational performance.

Hearing impairment means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects the student's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness. Deafness means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Resources

- [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Eligibility](#) - Texas Sensory Support Network
- [American Sign Language Dictionary](#)
- [American Society for Deaf Children](#)
- [Better Hearing Institute](#)
- [Described and Captioned Media Program](#)
- [Hearing Loss in Children \(CDC\)](#)
- [National Association of the Deaf \(NAD\)](#)
- [National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management \(NCHAM\)](#)
- [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#)
- [Region 11 ESC - State Lead for Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Texas Deaf Ed](#)
- [Texas Deaf/Hard of Hearing \(DHH\) Services](#)
- [Texas School for the Deaf](#)

Emotional Disability

Disability Criteria

A student with an Emotional Disability is one who has a condition exhibiting **one or more** of the following characteristics **over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance.**

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.



- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Emotional Disability includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disability.

Resources

- [Division for Emotional Behavioral Health](#)
- [Partners Resource Network](#)

Intellectual Disability

A student with an intellectual disability is one who has been determined to have significantly subaverage intellectual functioning as measured by a standardized, individually administered test of cognitive ability in which the overall test score is at least two standard deviations below the mean, when taking into consideration the standard error of measurement of the test; and concurrently exhibits deficits in at least two areas of adaptive behavior.

Disability Criteria

A student with an intellectual disability is one who:

- has been determined to have significantly subaverage intellectual functioning as measured by a standardized, individually administered test of cognitive ability in which the overall test score is at least two standard deviations below the mean, when taking into consideration the standard error of measurement of the test; **AND**
- concurrently exhibits deficits in at least two of the following areas of adaptive behavior: communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health, and safety.

Resources

- [American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [Texas Parent to Parent](#)
- [The ARC of Texas](#)

Multiple Disabilities

Disability Criteria

A child with multiple disabilities has concomitant disabilities (for example: an intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment).

In meeting the criteria for multiple disabilities, a child with multiple disabilities is one who has a combination of disabilities and who meets all of the following conditions:

- The disabilities are expected to continue indefinitely; **AND**



- The disabilities severely impair the child’s performance in two or more of the following areas:
 - Psychomotor skills
 - Self-care skills
 - Communication
 - Social and Emotional Development; **OR**
 - Cognition

A child who has more than one disability but who does not meet the criteria must not be classified or reported as having multiple disabilities. Multiple disabilities does not include deaf-blindness.

Resources

- [Center for Parent Information and Resources](#) (Multiple Disabilities)

Non-Categorical Early Childhood

Disability Criteria

Students between the ages of 3-5 may be eligible for special education and related services under Non-Categorical Early Childhood (NCEC). It is often difficult to identify very young children with a disability. With early intervention and appropriate services, children may no longer need to support special education by the time they reach first grade. This disability category is only appropriate if the child is between three and five years of age. This means that the child must be reevaluated and have an ARD prior to the child’s sixth birthday regardless of whether the three-year reevaluation is due.

Prior to the student’s sixth birthday, the student’s ARD Committee will conduct a REED and determine if a re-evaluation is needed. If additional assessment is needed to conclude that the student qualifies for any of the suspected disabilities, then that evaluation must be conducted before the student turns 6 years old. Additionally, whether conducting a REED or re-evaluation, the ARD/IEP committee must also meet before the student’s 6th birthday to remove the non-categorical disability, determine if there is a new disability or one that was suspected, and determine whether or not the student continues to meet eligibility for special education services.

The ARD Committee will take into consideration the following items:

- Educational opportunities and support given to the student since entering school
- How the student has progressed;
- Current testing data; **AND**
- Parent information including private or outside evaluations the family has obtained for their student.

Note: If NCEC is being utilized as the eligibility criteria, it **MUST** be noted as the **Primary Disability** in ARD Committee IEP Documents.



Resources

- [Early Childhood Outcomes and Prekindergarten Guidelines Alignment Document](#)
- [National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)

Developmental Delay

Disability Criteria

A student with developmental delay is one who is between the ages of 3-9 who is evaluated by a multidisciplinary team for at least one disability category listed in paragraphs (1)-(12) of this subsection and whose evaluation data indicates a need for special education and related services and shows evidence of, but does not clearly confirm, the presence of the suspected disability or disabilities due to the child's young age. In these cases, an ARD committee may determine that data supports identification of developmental delay in one or more of the following areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development.

Please note: At this time, Austin ISD will not be implementing the Developmental Delay (DD) eligibility category pending further guidance and technical assistance from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Our district will wait for this official TEA guidance before adopting any procedures related to Developmental Delay, ensuring that we adhere to all state requirements and provide consistent and appropriate support for our students.

Resources

- [Texas Health & Human Services - Early Childhood Intervention](#)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)

Other Health Impairment

Disability Criteria

A student may be eligible for special education and related services as a student with an other health impairment if the student presents with limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that:

- is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; **AND**
- adversely affects a student's educational performance.

An other health impairment evaluation is unique in that it requires both an educational determination of need based on assessment from a School Psychologists and/or Educational Diagnostician as well as a medical provider's determination from a licensed physician, a physician



assistant, or an advanced practice registered nurse with authority delegated under Texas Occupations Code, Chapter 157. existing evaluation data (REED) to include information from the eligibility form.

Note: In accordance with the revised Commissioner of Education rules that became effective summer 2024, rather than the listed health care providers being a part of the MDT, eligibility for Other Health Impairment must include identification or confirmation of the student's chronic or acute health condition provided by the listed health care providers.

Resources

- [Center for Parent Information & Resources - Other Health Impairment](#)

Orthopedic Impairment

Disability Criteria

Orthopedic impairment means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

A student with an orthopedic impairment is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for orthopedic impairment as stated in 34 CFR § 300.8(c)(8). The multidisciplinary team in their evaluation must determine that the student: (1) has a severe orthopedic impairment (2) that adversely affects the child's educational performance. Additionally, the multidisciplinary team that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of a student's eligibility based on an orthopedic impairment must include a licensed physician. Medical services under IDEA are defined as services provided by a licensed physician to determine whether a child has a medically related disabling condition, which results in the child's need for special education and related services (34 CFR § 300.34(c)(5)).

Note: In accordance with the revised Commissioner of Education rules that became effective summer 2024, rather than the licensed physician being a part of the multidisciplinary team (MDT), eligibility for Orthopedic Impairment must include a medical diagnosis provided by a licensed physician.

Resources

- [Cerebral Palsy Guide](#)
- [United Cerebral Palsy of Texas](#)



Speech Language Impairment

Disability Criteria

A student with a Speech or language impairment is one who has a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment. Speech impairments include:

- Articulation: where the child produces sounds incorrectly
- Fluency: where a child's flow of speech is disrupted by sounds, syllables and words that are repeated, prolonged or avoided or where they may be silent blocks, inappropriate inhalation, exhalation or phonation patterns
- Voice: where the child's voice has an abnormal quality to its pitch, resonance or loudness
- Language impairments where the child has problems expressing needs, ideas or information and or/in understanding what others say.

Resources

- [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association \(ASHA\)](#)
 - [Communication Milestones: Age Ranges](#)
 - [Typical Speech and Language Development](#)
 - [What is Speech? What is Language?](#)
 - [Your Child's Communication Development: Kindergarten Through Fifth Grade](#)
- [Center for Parent Information & Resources - Speech and Language Impairments](#)
- [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#)
 - [Speech and Language Developmental Milestones](#)
- [Speech-Language-Therapy Dot Com](#)
 - [Typical Expressive Language Development](#)
 - [Typical Speech and Language Acquisition in Infants and Young Children](#)
- [Texas Speech-Language Hearing Association](#)

Specific Learning Disability

Disability Criteria

A child with a learning disability does not achieve adequately for the child's age or meet state-approved grade-level standards in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading fluency skills, dyslexia, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation or mathematics problem solving when provided appropriate instruction. Adequate achievement is indicated by performance on multiple measures such as in-class tests; grade average over time (e.g. six weeks, semester), norm or criterion-referenced tests; statewide assessments; or a process based on a child's response to scientific research-based intervention, yet does not make progress upon provision of such interventions and exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance and/or achievement.



It is important to note that qualifying as a student with a specific learning disability does not include those with learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; intellectual disability; emotional disability; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. These are all rule out factors and must be considered when determining if a disability exists.

Dyslexia and Other Related Disorders

Dyslexia is recognized as a specific learning disability (SLD) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to the State Dyslexia Handbook, if there are concerns about dyslexia or dysgraphia, an evaluation through special education should be requested.

When dyslexia or dysgraphia is suspected, evaluators must review all the information gathered in the referral packet. This information is collected with the help of campus teachers, administrators, dyslexia interventionists, or special education teachers who have specific knowledge of dyslexia and reading development. The evaluator uses this referral documentation along with formal evaluation data to make an informed decision.

The [Dyslexia Handbook](#) outlines specific areas that need to be assessed and certain questions that must be answered to determine if a student has dyslexia. Evaluators will use a combination of formal and informal tools to gather data in the required areas. It's important not to rule out dyslexia based on just one test score or a single sub-test. A comprehensive evaluation that looks at multiple factors is necessary to make an accurate determination.

Resources

- [LD online](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of America](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of Texas](#)
- [National Center for Learning Disabilities \(NCLD\)](#)
- [SmartKids with Learning Disabilities](#)
- [Texas Center for Learning Disabilities \(TCLD\)](#)

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Disability Criteria

A student with traumatic brain injury is one who has been determined to meet the criteria due to an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. A wide range of traits are associated with traumatic injury, including memory difficulties, problems concentrating, motor difficulties, and struggles relating to peers.

Applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas:

- Cognition
- Language



- Memory
- Attention
- Reasoning
- Abstract thinking
- Judgment
- Problem-solving
- Sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities
- Psychosocial behavior
- Physical functions
- Information processing
- Speech

Traumatic brain injury does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Resources

- [Brainline - School and Education](#)
- [Center for Parent Information & Resources - Traumatic Brain Injury](#)

Visual Impairment (VI)

Disability Criteria

A student with a visual impairment is one who has been determined to meet the criteria for visual impairment. The visual loss in exact measures of visual field and corrected visual acuity at a distance and at close range in each eye must be in a report by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist.

Resources

- [Students with Visual Impairments: Eligibility for Special Education](#)
- [American Council of the Blind](#)
- [American Foundation for the Blind \(AFB\)](#)
- [Family Connect](#)
- [National Braille Association](#)
- [National Federation of the Blind](#)
- [Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#)

Specific Evaluation Instruments

Austin ISD's Special Education Department uses current, research-based assessment tools when evaluating students. The Director of Evaluation and the Director of Instructional Delivery, Inclusion, and Related Services regularly review these tools to ensure that the district has a wide range of assessments that are culturally and developmentally appropriate for all students.



Resources

[Texas SPED Support - Culturally Competent Considerations](#)

Evaluations with Alternate Forms of Communication

Any accommodations used during the evaluation process should be documented in the Full Individual Evaluation (FIE). For example, if a student uses an augmentative communication device or other forms of assistance, this should be noted.

Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED)

REEDs and Re-Evaluations

A re-evaluation, also known as a triennial evaluation, must occur at least once every three years, unless both the parent or guardian and the district agree that a re-evaluation is not necessary. After the initial evaluation, any further evaluations are considered re-evaluations. Every district is required to complete a re-evaluation at least once every three years.

If a student transfers from outside Texas and their previous evaluation doesn't meet Texas Education Agency (TEA) requirements or the eligibility criteria differ, a new evaluation will be treated as an Initial Evaluation and must follow the timeline for an initial assessment.

After the initial Full Individual and Initial Evaluation (FIIE), all subsequent evaluations are referred to as re-evaluations. These re-evaluations can either be comprehensive full individual evaluations (FIE) or an addendum to the previous FIIE or FIE. Before a re-evaluation is completed, a Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) must be conducted. Re-evaluations may not occur more than once a year unless both the parent and the Local Education Agency (LEA) agree otherwise, but they must occur at least once every three years unless both agree it's unnecessary.

A re-evaluation is required when:

- The LEA determines that the student's educational or related services needs, including academic achievement and functional performance, warrant a re-evaluation.
- The student's parent, guardian, or teacher requests a re-evaluation.
- The ARD committee needs to determine if the student continues to qualify as a student with a disability.
- An evaluation is needed as part of the summary of performance for students graduating.

Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED)

A Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) is a process where the ARD team looks at the student's current data, with input from the parent or guardian, to decide if any additional information is needed. This can be part of an initial evaluation (if appropriate) or a re-evaluation.



During the REED, the team needs to determine if more assessments are required to:

- Confirm whether the student has or continues to have a disability and understand the student's educational needs.
- See if the student's current levels of academic achievement and developmental needs have changed.
- Decide if the student still needs special education and related services.
- Determine if the student needs any changes or additions to their special education and related services to help them achieve the measurable annual goals in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and participate in the general education curriculum as appropriate.

REED Meeting Participants

A Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) is carried out by members of the student's Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee. This group must include the parent or adult student, a representative from the school district (LEA), a general education teacher, a special education teacher, someone who can explain the instructional implications of the evaluation results, and any other qualified personnel as needed. For students in Texas who are eligible as visually impaired, an appropriately certified orientation and mobility specialist must also be included in the team to help determine the scope of the re-evaluation.

When Reevaluations Serve as an FIE vs. an Addendum to an FIE/FIE

A re-evaluation that is a comprehensive Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) resets the student's triennial evaluation date, helping the school keep track of when the next re-evaluation is due. On the other hand, if the re-evaluation is done as an addendum to the existing FIE/FIE, the original evaluation date remains the same.

Reevaluations Serving as a Comprehensive FIE within Austin ISD

- Are required at least every three years and would be warranted if the most recent evaluation was conducted more than 2 years ago.
- Are required when a change of eligibility is suspected or is being considered. A possible exception is in the case of a speech dismissal.
- Are required with specific situations (e.g., due process, prior IEE requests, safety concerns)

Resources

[Texas SPED Support - REEDs and Re-Evaluations](#)

Summary of Performance (SOP)

The Summary of Performance (SOP) document is an important resource for students, families, and educators that helps support a student's successful transition after high school. Completing the SOP



is a legal requirement for all students receiving special education services who are graduating or leaving public school due to age.

For students graduating under the Foundation High School Program or the Minimum High School Program with at least one course that has a modified curriculum, an evaluation must be included as part of the SOP. If the student's evaluation is up to date, a new evaluation isn't needed; the current Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) will be used in writing the SOP.

The SOP includes:

- A summary of the student's academic achievements and functional performance.
- Recommendations to help the student achieve their post-secondary goals.
- Input from the student, parents, and relevant service agencies on how to support the student in reaching those goals.
- Information about any accommodations that have been necessary or helpful for the student in completing academic and functional tasks.

Resources

- [Summary of Performance Quick Guide](#)
- [Graduation Toolkit](#)

Newcomer Evaluations

Newcomer evaluations follow the same process as the school aged, early childhood, or private/homeschool referrals. The Austin ISD International Welcome Center (IWC) offers resources to welcome and assist newcomer families. The IWC was developed to support Newcomer and Refugee Families at AISD campuses.

Students who Transfer into the District

When an Initial Evaluation is Pending

If a child is in the middle of being evaluated for special education eligibility and enrolls in a new school district (LEA), the new district must work with the previous district as quickly and effectively as possible to ensure the evaluation is completed promptly ([89.1011\(f\)](#); [300.304\(c\)\(5\)](#)).

Evaluation of Related and Support Service Procedures

Counseling as a Related Service (CARS) Evaluation

Counseling as a Related Service (CARS) can be provided to students with disabilities who have ongoing, severe behavioral, emotional, or social challenges and need specialized instruction through special education. CARS evaluations and services may be offered by qualified professionals such as social workers, school psychologists, counselors, or interns who are supervised by licensed or certified professionals.



Austin ISD Mental Health Specialists and School Psychologists conduct evaluations for counseling as a related service (CARS) and psychological services to help determine if students are eligible for these services. In our district, Mental Health Specialists assess students for CARS, provide individual or group counseling as needed, support schools with consultation, and offer professional development on mental health needs. These services are delivered according to professional standards.

CARS and psychological services are considered during every initial evaluation for students suspected of having an emotional or behavioral disability. This is documented in the student's Full and Individual Initial Evaluation (FIIE). The evaluator will provide the parent with a Notice of Procedural Safeguards, a Notice of Proposal to Evaluate (which will include the CARS assessment), and obtain Consent for Evaluation. For students already receiving special education services, if counseling as a related service or psychological services are thought to be necessary for progress on their IEP, an evaluation can be requested during an ARD Committee meeting. The ARD notice will include a review of existing evaluation data (REED) to discuss the evaluation, and the appropriate team members will be invited to the meeting. If a counseling or psychological service evaluation is requested, a District Mental Health Specialist (MHS) or School Psychologist (LSSP) must be present at the ARD meeting

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)

A Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) may be needed for children who are experiencing significant behavior problems at school. The purpose of the FBA is to identify the conditions under which the problem behavior occurs, what triggers it, what reinforces it, and any patterns related to time of day or other factors. The information from the FBA is then used to create a comprehensive Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) for the student.

Before developing and implementing a BIP for the first time, an FBA must be conducted, which requires written consent from the parent or guardian. The FBA is also used when updating or modifying a BIP to address new behaviors. For students already receiving special education services, consent for an FBA is obtained by completing a Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) as part of an ARD/IEP meeting. An evaluator must be present at this meeting to complete the REED and provide Prior Written Notice for Evaluations and Consent. Once consent is given, the FBA can begin.

If an FBA has never been conducted or if the most recent FBA is more than a year old, [House Bill 785](#) requires the school district (LEA) to seek consent from the parent or guardian to conduct an FBA when a disciplinary action results in a change of placement for a special education student. The LEA must request this consent by the 10th school day after the change of placement. When a disciplinary action causes a change of placement under federal law, the LEA must review any previous FBAs and BIPs and revise them as needed.

Before conducting a re-evaluation Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), the teacher or case manager must complete the district's in-person training, which is offered throughout the school



year. Special Education campus case managers are responsible for conducting their own FBA but can consult with district special education staff for support and guidance. An FBA is carried out by a trained staff member who collects both direct and indirect data, including interviews and surveys. This information is compiled to create a clear understanding of when and where behaviors are occurring. The data is then analyzed to develop a hypothesis, which helps educators determine the functions of the behavior and decide whether a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is needed.

Transition Assessments and Functional Vocational Evaluations (FVE)

Transition services for students with disabilities may include a Functional Vocational Evaluation (FVE) if it's determined to be appropriate. An FVE is part of the transition program and involves various assessment techniques to observe, measure, and predict a student's vocational potential and help develop postsecondary employment goals. However, many students receiving special education services do not need an FVE because other career and transition assessments are usually sufficient for setting postsecondary goals and planning for employment.

When planning for transitions, a Functional Vocational Evaluation is completed only if it is deemed necessary based on the student's individual needs. The school team should understand what an FVE involves and when it is appropriate to use it. As part of the transition planning process, the student, family, and case manager/classroom teacher work together to develop transition surveys. These surveys are crucial in creating the transition section of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are discussed and updated during the student's annual ARD meetings.

If the existing career and transition assessments have not been effective in developing a student's postsecondary employment goals, an FVE might be considered. If the ARD Committee is considering an FVE, a staffing meeting must be held before the ARD meeting. This staffing should include the campus support coordinator, transition coordinator, and an evaluation representative.

During the staffing meeting, the team will review:

- Assessments that have already been completed for the student.
- Additional information needed to develop the transition plan, including postsecondary employment goals and annual goals related to vocational skills.
- The student's current IEP, FIE, past school performance, and any vocational opportunities the student has participated in, such as Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses or work-based learning.

If the team decides that an FVE is appropriate, an ARD meeting will be scheduled to consider the recommendation for the FVE. The evaluation staff from the staffing meeting must also be present at the ARD meeting to conduct a Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED).

At the ARD, the committee will conduct the REED and make the final determination if an FVE is needed. If needed, the evaluator will obtain consent and the transition team will conduct the FVE.



Occupational Therapy (OT) Evaluations

Students who may need an Occupational Therapy (OT) evaluation are those who show significant delays or impairments in areas like fine motor skills, visual motor skills, sensory processing, self-care related to school, and upper body movement. These issues must be significant enough to require intervention for the student to benefit from their educational environment.

School-based OT services are provided to help students participate in educational activities and programming. However, Occupational Therapy as a Related Service is only offered if it is necessary for the student to benefit from their educational program. The need for OT services is not based solely on the presence of a disability. Instead, it is provided under IDEA to support the student's goals outlined in their Individualized Education Program (IEP). After the occupational therapist conducts an evaluation and makes recommendations, the ARD Committee will determine and specify the OT services in the IEP.

A written evaluation report will be created and shared with the parent or guardian as soon as possible after completion of the report but no later than five (5) school days before the ARD/IEP meeting. The occupational therapist will attend the ARD/IEP meeting to review the report and discuss their recommendations. The ARD Committee will then decide whether OT services are needed based on the evaluation.

For students already receiving special education services, the parent, teacher, or ARD Committee may request an OT evaluation if it is suspected that the student needs these services to benefit from their education. If an additional evaluation is necessary, the student's parents will be asked to provide consent for the OT evaluation.

Physical Therapy (PT) Evaluations

Students who may need a Physical Therapy (PT) evaluation include those with mobility impairments, sensorimotor delays, muscle, orthopedic, neurological, or respiratory disorders, or postural issues that are severe enough to require intervention for the student to benefit from their educational environment.

School-based physical therapists can evaluate students with disabilities to determine if they need PT services within the school setting. Physical therapy, as a related service to special education, may be recommended to the ARD Committee if a PT's expertise is necessary for the student to access the general education curriculum, participate in their educational environment, and benefit from their specially designed educational program. For students already receiving special education services, the parent, teacher, or ARD Committee may request a PT evaluation to see if these services are needed to support the student's education. If it is determined that an additional evaluation is necessary, the parents will be asked to provide consent for the PT evaluation.



Educational vs. Medical Models of Evaluation

School-based Occupational Therapy (OT), Physical Therapy (PT), Speech, and Counseling services are provided as part of a student's educational program. These services require an evaluation to ensure that there is an educational need and that they help students access education in the least restrictive environment while benefiting from special education. These services are only provided when the necessary instructional strategies cannot be met by special education or regular education staff because the expertise required is specific to the related service provider.

Children can receive support in various environments, including clinics, home, and public schools. Evaluations and services provided in the school setting operate under the educational model, focusing on skills that affect a student's ability to access education and succeed academically in school.

In contrast, evaluations and services provided outside the school, such as in hospitals, clinics, or home health settings, follow the medical model. This model addresses areas of need to maximize a child's functionality and independence in all areas of life—home, school, and the community.

As Giangreco (2020) explains, "Students with disabilities do not attend school to receive related services (therapies); they receive services so they can attend and participate in school." It's important to understand that differences between medical and educational recommendations for the same student can result from differing standards and obligations. The school's IEP team is not required to provide services that will maximize a student's potential but must instead provide students with disabilities a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). FAPE means that students with IEPs are provided services that help them access educational opportunities and make appropriate progress.

Evaluation Addendums

Evaluation addendums are to be used if the most recent evaluation was conducted less than 2 years ago for reevaluations that would NOT potentially result in a change to special education eligibility considerations (e.g., functional behavior assessment (FBA), related service evaluation OT, PT, APE, Counseling etc..).

Contracting with Outside Providers for Evaluation

The District may hire outside providers to conduct initial evaluations and reevaluations for Austin ISD students if needed. When doing so, the District will follow all contract and procurement policies and procedures, including requesting proposals as required by Board policy. The District will also ensure that all necessary documentation is maintained to comply with the Texas Student Data System (TSDS), Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), and State Performance Plan Indicators (SPPI).



Outside Evaluations Provided by Parents/Families

When a parent or family submits an evaluation report for a student who is not currently receiving special education services, the campus administrator will contact the parents to discuss their concerns or schedule a meeting with the child study team. The goal of this discussion is to gather information about the parent's concerns, review the supports already in place or available through general education, and determine whether a referral for a special education evaluation or a 504 Accommodation Plan is needed or appropriate.

For students who are already eligible for and receiving an Individualized Education Program (IEP), if parents submit an outside evaluation (independent evaluation at their own expense), the campus administrator and/or special education department chair should inform the campus evaluator. The campus evaluator will collaborate with the special education department chair to schedule a Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) meeting to review and consider the information and recommendations included in the outside evaluation. During this meeting, the REED and ARD committee will decide whether Austin ISD should conduct their own evaluation to fully understand the student's needs.

Independent Educational Evaluations (IEE)

An Independent Educational Evaluation ("IEE") is an evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the student's school district. If a parent/guardian of a student disagrees with an evaluation conducted by Austin ISD, the parent has the right to request an IEE at public expense. Public expense means that the district either pays for the full cost of the evaluation or ensures that the evaluation is otherwise provided at no cost to the parent.

A parent/guardian is entitled to **only one** IEE at public expense each time the District conducts an evaluation with which the parent disagrees. The results of an IEE completed in accordance with the criteria identified in these guidelines will be considered by a student's ARD committee regardless of whether the IEE is obtained at private or public expense. While the ARD committee **must consider** the IEE, the ARD committee remains responsible for the development of an appropriate education program for the student and is not required to adopt the IEE's recommendations or conclusions.

A parent/guardian **must provide a written request** for an IEE at public expense. This can be completed via an email request or written correspondence directly to the Director of Evaluations, Amanda M. Reyes (amanda.m.reyes@austinisd.org). Austin ISD asks that the request include why the parent disagrees with the evaluation so that the district may consider whether there is any opportunity to resolve the parent's concerns, but this information is **not required** in order to obtain an IEE at public expense.

As posted online on the Austin ISD Special Education website, IEE requests are received and managed by Amanda M. Reyes, Director of Evaluations, and Cindy Lopez, Administrative Assistant. Parents/guardians are sent an email of acknowledgement immediately upon receiving their request, informing them of a guideline of 30 calendar days to allow for review of request, and



informed that they will receive a letter of approval/denial indicating next steps. The law states that the district must respond without unnecessary delay but does not establish a specific timeframe. It is best practice for the district to respond as soon as possible but generally no later than 30 calendar days.

A request for an IEE at public expense must occur within one (1) year of the district evaluation with which the parent/guardian disagrees. The district will respond to a written parental request for an IEE without unnecessary delay by doing one (1) of the following [34 CFR 300.502]:

- Ensure the IEE requested is provided at public expense unless the evaluation requested by the parent does not meet the district's criteria; **OR**
- Initiate a due process hearing to show that the district's evaluation is appropriate. If the district prevails in the hearing, the parent has the right to an IEE, but not at public expense.

Austin ISD will provide the parent with information about where an IEE may be obtained and the District's criteria applicable for IEEs. If you prefer to choose an independent evaluator that is not on the District's list, the selected IEE provider and report must comply with the following.

If the IEE is provided at public expense, the criteria under which the evaluation is obtained, including the location of the evaluation and the qualifications of the examiner, must be the same as the criteria that Austin ISD uses when it initiates an evaluation.

The IEE evaluator must:

- Have the same qualifications that Austin ISD uses when it initiates an evaluation;
- Possess current licensure and/or certification in Texas to conduct the specific evaluation(s);
- Meet appropriate professional requirements in the state and be trained to administer the specific tests and other evaluation materials used in conformance with the instructions provided by the producer; **AND**
- Be located within a 35-mile radius of the Austin area or this will require pre-approval from the Director of Evaluations.

Lastly, the IEE:

- Fee or cost must not exceed 35% above the Medicaid/School Health and Related Services (SHARS) rate for the specific evaluation;
- Report must comply with the federal and state requirements that are applicable to district evaluations; **AND**
- Evaluator or company must provide Austin ISD and the parent at the same time the written copy of the evaluation upon completion.

Austin ISD may not impose any conditions or timelines to the IEE provider. Once the evaluation report is received by the District, the Evaluation Director and/or Administrative Assistant emails the campus a copy and recommends they schedule an ARD meeting to consider the results of the IEE in any decision made with respect to the provision of an FAPE.

For additional guidance, refer to the [AISD IEE Operating Guidelines](#).



Evaluation Through Section 504

If a student does not meet the disability criteria under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or does not require special education services due to their disability, campus staff may refer the student to the personnel who oversee Section 504 at the campus or district level. The student might still be eligible for accommodations or services under Section 504.

Section 504 ensures that students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities, including the provision of related services. These related services can vary based on the individual needs of the student and may include accommodations such as specialized instruction, counseling, assistive technology, and transportation. Accommodations under Section 504 are designed to help students with disabilities access education on an equal basis with their peers.

The process for a Section 504 referral and evaluation is systematic and typically starts with a referral from school staff, parents, or a medical diagnosis. This process assesses the student's needs and determines eligibility. Collaboration among school personnel, parents, and relevant specialists is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the student's strengths, challenges, and necessary supports. After the evaluation, the student's eligibility for Section 504 services is determined. If eligible, an Individualized Accommodation Plan (IAP) is developed to provide the appropriate accommodations and support to facilitate the student's access to education. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, have a record of such an impairment, or be regarded as having such an impairment.

If students receiving 504 services need additional support beyond what Section 504 provides, campus 504 teams should refer these students for a special education evaluation. Similarly, if students are no longer eligible or do not qualify for special education services, they may still qualify for Section 504 services and should be referred accordingly.

When a Full Individual and Initial Evaluation (FIIE) finds that a student does not have a disability but identifies an academic weakness, the evaluator should carefully consider whether to recommend a Section 504 evaluation in the FIIE report. The campus Section 504 committee must review the data, including the recent FIIE, to determine whether the child qualifies as a disabled student under Section 504 guidelines. Tiered interventions or supplemental instruction targeting specific skill gaps may be more appropriate in some cases.

For more information about Section 504, please visit our Austin ISD Section 504 website or contact your campus 504 coordinator. Each campus has one or more staff members serving as the 504 coordinator. If you have questions about Section 504, please reach out to the assigned 504 coordinator or contact the District 504 Director, Dr. Kimberley Pollard at kimberley.pollard@austinisd.org.



4. Evaluation Reports

Each evaluator conducting an assessment will provide a written summary that outlines the procedures used, the results, and the diagnostic impressions. The evaluator will describe the student's needs and make recommendations in clear, educationally relevant terms. These recommendations should not include decisions about eligibility, specific programs, placements, or particular classrooms or schools.

Evaluation reports must be completed by the 45th school day. The evaluator is required to give a copy of the report to the parent and review the results with them before the ARD/IEP meeting.

Delayed Evaluations and Compensatory Services

Compensatory services are educational services provided to a student to make up for progress or skills lost when the District did not offer a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This situation might occur if a child did not receive special education services due to a delay in their initial evaluation, but was later found eligible. If an initial evaluation was wrongly denied, resulting in delayed access to FAPE, compensatory services may be necessary to correct the initial oversight.

These services are tailored to the student's unique needs and can take many forms. They can be provided during the regular school day, before or after school, on weekends, during school breaks, or through outside service providers. If compensatory services are given during the school day, they must not change the student's least restrictive environment.

Decisions about compensatory services are made based on the overall circumstances for each student. Key factors to consider include:

- Was the student making progress? (Is there evidence of student growth?)
- Was the gap between the student's skills and grade-level expectations getting larger or smaller? (Was the student catching up to peers or falling further behind?)
- How can we minimize the impact of missed services?
- What strategies can we use to accelerate the student's progress rather than just making up for missed service minutes?

Recommendations in the evaluation report help guide the ARD committee. In addition to these recommendations, the ARD Committee also carefully considers input from the student and family when deciding how and when compensatory services will be provided.



5. School Health & Related Services (SHARS) Billing

The School Health and Related Services (SHARS) program allows Texas schools to receive reimbursement for Medicaid health-related services provided to students with disabilities. These services must be medically necessary and reasonable to ensure that children with disabilities can fully participate in their educational program. More information about requirements related to SHARS can be found in the [SHARS Handbook](#) and on TEA's [School Health and Related Services](#) page.

Parental Consent for SHARS Billing

The District must provide written notice to parents before asking for consent to access benefits for the first time and then again each year. Austin ISD staff members will obtain parental consent before releasing a child's personally identifiable information to a public benefits or insurance program for billing purposes for the first time.

SHARS reimbursement is available for students who have parental consent to share their information with Medicaid and who meet the following criteria:

- Are 20 years of age or younger
- Are currently eligible for Medicaid
- Are enrolled in a public school's special education program
- Meet the special education requirements described in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Have a current Individualized Education Program (IEP) that prescribes the needed services.



6. Confidentiality & Records

Inspection of Records

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects student privacy by giving parents certain rights over their child's education records and limiting who can access these records. Both FERPA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) give parents the right to review and inspect their child's education records, including evaluation protocols and notes taken during the evaluation process. If test protocols contain personally identifiable information, they are considered education records under IDEA and FERPA, so parents have the right to inspect and review them. Letter to Price, 57 IDELR 50 (OSEP 2010); and Letter to Shuster, 108 LRP 2302, 11 FAB 30 (OSEP 2007).

Storage of Records

In Austin ISD, the Evaluation, Speech, and Related Services teams all maintain and store in a centralized location, student protocols and associated documentation for assessments.

Transfer of and Access to Student Records

Parents wishing to obtain copies of their child's educational records such as IEPs and FIEs should identify the specific records in a written request to the campus principal. Parents may review records during school hours or request copies to review. Parents who discover inaccurate or misleading information in their child's records may follow the procedures outlined [here](#). For students who transfer between Texas public schools, the Texas Records Exchange ([TREx](#)) system is utilized to request and obtain student records.

If a family requests that an evaluator discuss their student's records with someone outside of AISD, consent to share this information must be obtained.

Special Education/504 Parent Portal

Parents/guardians/adult students will receive an email from "EDPlan Connect" with access each time there is a new document requiring review or signature. These documents include IEPs, progress reports, 504 documents, etc. For additional information on how to access the parent portal please reference the PDF documents below.

[AISD EDPlan Connect Parent Portal Guide 2023 - English](#)

[AISD EDPlan Connect Parent Portal Guide 2023 - Spanish](#)



7. Helpful Links

Austin ISD is dedicated to providing parents and guardians with the support they need to be fully involved in the success of their children. We are committed to providing resources and information to support students, families, staff, and community members to strengthen partnerships, foster collaboration, and promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Texas Legal Framework

- <https://framework.esc18.net/>
- [Glossary of Terminology](#)

Texas Education Agency

- [TEA SPED Index](#)
- [Overview of Special Education for Parents \(English\)](#) and [Overview of Special Education for Parents \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Special Education Rules and Regulations](#)
- [TEA's IDEA 1- Pager](#)

SPEDTex

- The **SPEDTex** Resource Locator is your gateway to special education resources. From accommodations to transition and everything in between, the SPEDTex Resource Locator lets you tailor your search by topic, language, and type. Simply select an option to begin your search.

Overview of Special Education Evaluation Process

- [Overview of Special Education for Parents](#) (Updated August 24, 2023),
- [Overview of Special Education for Parents \(Spanish\)](#) (Updated August 24, 2023)
- [SpedTex Video](#)
- [AISD Overview of Special Education English](#)
- [AISD Overview of Special Education Spanish](#)
- [AISD Video Transcript ENG](#)
- [AISD Video Transcript SPN](#)
- [Child Find Process for Parentally Placed Private School Children with Disabilities Quick Guide](#)

