

Evaluation and Eligibility Determinations

An evaluation is an individualized discovery process to determine if a child meets the eligibility criteria for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) and, if so, what are the child's educational programming needs. Evaluations are conducted by a Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET) consisting of multiple methods including reviewing existing records, interviewing important informants, observing the child in his/her environmental settings, and administering formal and informal assessments and measures. The results of an evaluation are summarized in a psychoeducational report used by the MET to determine eligibility for special education and related services.

The Local education agencies (LEAs), State Board-governed schools, State adult and juvenile correctional facilities (see CF.C), and special State agency schools **may** make educational eligibility determinations. University-based programs, the 15 local juvenile detention centers (See appendix CF.C), private school programs, private facilities, and Head Start centers **may not** determine eligibility; rather, they must work with the public agencies responsible for Child Find to determine eligibility for special education and related services. The following sections provide detailed information about procedures used by LEAs, State Board-governed schools, or special State agency schools regarding: the MET, the evaluation process, the eligibility determination process, and the re-evaluation process.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET)

The public agency must assemble a MET to respond to requests for comprehensive evaluations for children identified through Child Find activities, referrals from Part C Early Intervention Programs (First Steps), and requests from parents, teachers, Teacher Support Teams (TST), and other individuals knowledgeable about the child.

Each MET is responsible for:

- Determining if the child is in need of a comprehensive evaluation;
- Designing the comprehensive evaluation; and
- Determining if the child meets eligibility criteria for special education and related services.

MET Membership

The MET must include input from parents and collect, analyze, and interpret information to make an informed decision about the eligibility of a child for special education and related services. Depending upon the requirements of the specific evaluation and the nature of the child's suspected disability, many different people may be members of the MET. The MET must

consist of the parents or guardians designated to make educational decisions for the child (unless they choose not to participate), qualified professionals from the list below who can administer individual diagnostic assessments and interpret the results, a general education teacher and/or care providers with direct knowledge of the child. It is recommended a MET Chairperson who can allocate school resources for the evaluation and resolve disagreements in eligibility determination decisions be included as needed.

Qualified professionals who are a part of the MET may include:

- **Regular Education Teachers** who have knowledge of the child, general curriculum, and Tiered Intervention supports;
- **Special Education Teachers** who have knowledge of disabilities and educational programming needs and who can conduct educational assessments;
- **Speech-Language Pathologists** who have knowledge of typical and atypical language and speech development and impairments and who can conduct speech, language, fluency, and/or voice assessments;
- **Speech Therapists** who have knowledge of typical and atypical speech development and impairments and who can conduct speech assessments;
- **School Psychologists** who have knowledge of typical and atypical development, education, interventions, and disabilities and who can conduct cognitive, academic, adaptive, social-emotional, and behavioral assessments, interviews, and observations;
- **Psychometrists** who have knowledge of human development and the administration of formal assessments and, depending upon their specialized training, who can conduct cognitive, academic, adaptive, social-emotional, and behavioral assessments, interviews, and observations;
- **School Health Nurses** who have knowledge of physical development, health, and impairments and who can conduct health screenings and orofacial examinations;
- **School Counselors** who have knowledge of typical and atypical social-emotional and occupational development and, depending upon their specialized training, who can conduct child and family interviews, educational/occupational assessments, and child observations;
- **School Social Workers** who have knowledge of typical and atypical social functioning and family systems and who can conduct child and family interviews, adaptive assessments and environmental observations; or
- **Representatives of other agencies and/or additional examiners** as needed, such as Audiologists, Physical Therapists, Physicians/Nurse Practitioners, Psychiatrists, Occupational Therapists, Ophthalmologist/Optometrists, or Rehabilitation Specialists.
- **Behavior Specialists** who has knowledge of and provides specialized behavioral assessments and treatment interventions.

NOTE: In the case of a preschool child who is not enrolled in a district preschool education program, a teacher qualified to teach children of that age or the child's current direct care

providers (e.g., Head Start teachers or private preschool providers), if applicable, should be invited to participate as a member of the MET.

MET membership must be configured based on the specific concerns of the referral. MET membership may change based on needs or concerns identified during the evaluation process. See *Qualified Examiners* (Appendix EE.D) and State Board Policy 7219, Special Education Eligibility Guidelines for additional information on the specific qualifications required for members of the MET. The *MET Documentation Form* (Appendix CF.H), or a similar form, may be used to document any MET meetings or decisions.

Determining the Need for an Initial Evaluation

When a parent, public agency representative, TST member, or other individual knowledgeable about the child makes a verbal or written request for an evaluation of a child, the public agency will assemble a MET to consider the request and determine the need for conducting a comprehensive evaluation. The public agency should have procedures for documenting verbal requests, as well as the process for handling any requests when school is not in session. **The public agency must ensure that requests for evaluations and responses to those requests are not limited by the number per year or the time of year the requests are received.**

The MET must meet within fourteen (14) days of receiving the request to consider the request and review any pertinent documentation and existing data. The public agency must invite the parent and others knowledgeable of the child to participate in the meeting. The MET may use the *Meeting Invitation* (Appendix PS.D), or a similar form, to invite the parent to participate in the meeting. Parental consent is not required for the review of existing data (e.g., existing teacher or related service provider observations, ongoing classroom assessments, criterion-referenced tests that are used to determine child progress, administration of tests or other assessments that are administered to all children, or screening by teachers or specialists to determine appropriate instructional strategies for curriculum implementation) to determine the need for a comprehensive evaluation.

Based on this review, the MET will either determine:

- There is sufficient evidence to suspect that the child may have a disability; or
- There is insufficient evidence to suspect that the child may have a disability.

NOTE: The standard of “suspecting a child may have a disability” is an intentionally low threshold to ensure that all children who may—but not necessarily will—qualify for special education services are provided a comprehensive evaluation. The intention is to prevent under-identification, as well as over-identification, of children with disabilities who need special

education and related services. The MET should not attempt to pre-determine whether or not a child will be eligible for special education before conducting a comprehensive evaluation.