

## **Making a Referral for Special Education**

### **❖ *What are Special Education services?***

Each school district has a duty to locate students residing within the district who might be in need of special education and provide appropriate service to those who qualify. In order to meet its “child find” obligations, each district has procedures in place to locate, identify, and evaluate students between the ages of 3 and 21 who are suspected of having a disability and may be eligible for special education and related services.

### **❖ *Who is eligible for special education services for 3-5 year olds?***

Eligibility for service is determined by a team of professionals from the school district. If child has a

- 1) disability
- 2) that impacts educational progress and
- 3) is in need of specially designed instruction, s/he can qualify for services in their area of delay(s).

The evaluation team will look at development in speech/language, cognitive development, fine and gross motor skills, adaptive and social skills.

### **❖ *Who can make a referral for special education?***

The PSESD Early Learning Program’s philosophy is that parents, not EL Program staff, make the referral requesting their child be evaluated to determine eligibility for special education. Early Learning staff play an important part in this process by helping parents understand the needs of their child and articulate them to the Child Find team, helping parents develop the advocacy skills needed to support their child, and providing copies of screenings and assessments to the parent so they can complete the referral paperwork.

### **❖ *Does the request need to be in writing?***

Yes. A request for an evaluation to determine if a child qualifies to receive special education services must be made in writing. When requesting an evaluation be sure to include all relevant Early Learning documents i.e. ASQ, DECA, parent concerns, observational data and/or examples of the child’s work. Be as specific as you can about why you think the child may need special education services and all of the areas of developmental delay. If you think, for example, that the child has difficulty speaking clearly or has difficulty interacting with peers then ask that both areas (speech and social-emotional development) be evaluated. Provide any additional documents which indicate that the child may have a diagnosis, such as letters from doctors or day care providers. If the child is screened through Child Find, parent will be asked to sign a form giving the district permission to evaluate their child. This also serves as the written request for evaluation.

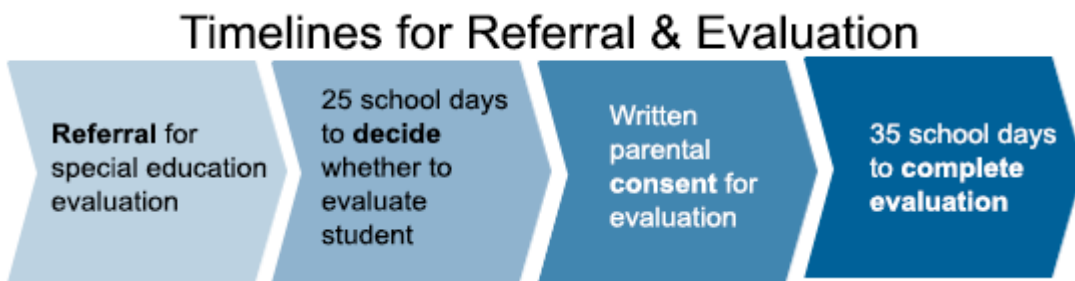
### **❖ *To whom do I submit the request for an evaluation?***

If at any time you believe a child may need special education, parents should contact the Child Find Coordinator for their school district to request that their child be evaluated for special education. Send

the written referral to the Child Find Coordinator for the home district. Keep a copy of the written request(s) for the files. If the child is not in an Early Learning Program associated with a school district, the child may have to go through a Child Find screening prior to being moved forward for an evaluation. In many districts there are school level Student Support Teams that will review the screenings completed by Early Learning staff and make the decision on evaluation. If you need assistance with site level teams, please contact your program Director and/or the PSESD Disabilities Coordinator.

❖ ***What happens after making a referral?***

- The written request for an evaluation puts into motion a series of timelines the school district must meet in response to- the request. The district must make a decision within 25 school days as to whether or not it will evaluate the child.



❖ ***How will the district make a decision about evaluating- the child ?***

A meeting to discuss the referral is not required. If, however, a meeting is scheduled to take place, then families must be invited to attend. The referral process includes a review of existing data about the child. Existing data includes, but is not limited to, information families provide, medical information, and information about how the child is progressing in preschool. Based on this information, the district must make a decision within 25 school days as to whether or not it will evaluate the child.

❖ ***What happens if a school district decides not to evaluate the child?***

If a school district decides the information in the referral does not support the need for an evaluation, it must notify parents with a Prior Written Notice letter of its decision not to evaluate. The Prior Written Notice must include the reasons why the district does not believe the child needs to be evaluated and the results of any screenings used in making that determination. Parents have rights and protections to resolve disagreements related to special education decisions and services. Those rights are called Procedural Safeguards.

❖ ***What happens if the child is determined eligible through the evaluation process?***

The results will be reviewed with the family (and Early learning staff upon parent’s request) and a meeting time will be set to develop an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for the child and other relevant school district team members important to creating a plan to determine educational goals and services .

❖ ***What is an IEP and why do I need it?***

The IEP is a written plan that defines where your child is currently functioning, both strengths and needs, and defines where the team (always including family) believes the child should be heading in terms of individualized educational goals and how the team plans to help the child meet those goals, through accommodations and services. The IEP must be reviewed at least annually but can be reviewed and adjusted more frequently, if the IEP team believes it is necessary to serve the child. A parent can request an IEP team meeting at any time if they feel the program is not meeting the needs of their child. You have the right to decline services or to revoke your permission for services at a later date, if you feel it does not serve your child's best interest, as covered in the Procedural Safeguards.

❖ ***Do I have to pay for services?***

No, every child is entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under the law.

For additional information:

[www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc](http://www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc) the "Short and Sweet IEP Overview"

[www.nichcy.org/educatechildren/iep/pages/default.aspx](http://www.nichcy.org/educatechildren/iep/pages/default.aspx) what the law requires, who is part of the IEP team

[www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/993](http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/993) bulleted list of tips on attending IEP meetings for parents. Available in Spanish and English.