

My Child is Being Tested for Special Education. Now what?

An Overview of the Individual Education Plan or Admission, Review and Dismissal Meeting

After the assessment process, **assessment personnel will inform you if your child qualifies for Special education and with what disability/disabilities.** You are **provided a copy of the report before the initial Admission, Review and Dismissal Meeting (ARD).** (Note: in Texas the meeting and the goals and objectives adopted are commonly called at ARD. The rest of the country refers to the meeting and the agreements reached an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Therefore, you may hear both terms used interchangeably.) *The report should be reviewed with you.* It may be long with many scores that you will not understand. However, there will also be *useful, concrete recommendations based on the needs of the child.*

The purpose of the evaluation is to determine if there is a disability, to develop a learner profile, and determine if special education services will be needed. Therefore, it is very important for the evaluator to have the best information available from all parties. A medical diagnosis is not the same as an evaluation for special education. There are specific disability categories defined by special education law.

You have the **right to refuse special education services. Be sure you understand what services you will not receive as a result.** You also **have the right to request additional school-based testing or an independent educational evaluation (IEE).** There are requirements when selecting an independent evaluator. The school may refuse this request but must take additional steps to show that its evaluation is appropriate.

Every student who has qualified for Special Education services has an **Individual Education Plan** that is created, monitored for progress, and reviewed at an annual Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meeting. The agreed upon plan should be related to enrolled grade level curriculum and strengthening the student's ability to reach those goals with an eye on the ultimate post graduation goals. This does not necessarily mean performing at grade level, but working towards the capability of performing at grade level.

At the ARD meeting there will be you and your spouse, a general and special education teacher, an administrator, the assessment person and your child if you want them there or they are old enough to participate. You comprise the

voting members of the committee. There may be other staff present such as Occupational or Physical therapist, speech therapist, adaptive physical education teachers, vision teachers, or other related services staff that will support your child depending on assessments for educational need. If there is not a need for a service in order to access the curriculum, then services are not provided even if you think it would be a “good idea”. For example, the child may not qualify for occupational therapy just because they have poor handwriting. They must meet the requirements of the test to determine if they need the services.

There is a **defined order to the meeting**. Feel free to *ask questions and clarify anything that you do not understand*.

INTRODUCTIONS of People in Attendance

PURPOSE OF ARD/IEP MEETING

1. **Review Evaluation Data and Other Information**
2. **Determination of Eligibility**
3. **Transition Planning** if the child is 14 or older. This is planning for adulthood so there can be a successful transition from school to the desired outcome as a student begins the next phase of their life.
4. **Review Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAPF)**. Staff will report data collected from multiple sources on the present level of functioning. This is the baseline for determining growth in the next year. If you disagree radically with the Present Level of Performance, speak up since this provides the base upon which annual goals and objectives are determined.
5. **ARD/IEP Additional Considerations:**
 - **Communication**
 - **Language (Limited English proficiency)**
 - **Auditory Impairment**
 - **Blind/Visual Impairment**
 - **Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)** If there are behaviors that warrant a formal approach to changing the behavior, a plan will be developed that all school personnel must follow. It will be based on a Functional Behavior Assessment.

6. **Annual Goals and Objectives.**

From the PLAAFP, the ARD committee can **determine what the needs of the student are to reach grade level expectations.** The STAAR ALT Curriculum Framework (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt/frameworks/>) on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website provides a list of prerequisite skills related to the enrolled grade level TEK. Aligned prerequisite skills are listed in the order that they should be taught regardless of a student's age. Based on the PLAAFP and a continuum, **the ARD Committee will determine the annual goals (yearlong goals that build toward achieving post-school or long term outcomes) and objectives (the stepping stones to reach those goals) that will be implemented for the following year.** Both the annual goals and the objectives should be written so that they are observable and measurable. They need to be clearly defined so that everyone can understand the expectation. Indicators of progress monitoring are selected.

Best practice is to communicate with parents before the ARD about their expectations and the goals that the school is suggesting. A rough draft should go home before the meeting. The ARD committee must accept the goals before they are implemented. If you have questions or concerns, ask the committee or the teacher.

7. **Accommodations or Supplementary Aids & Services.** **Accommodations** are supports that a student needs to access the general education curriculum. For example, the use of a calculator, a word bank, highlighted text or copy of class notes. The student is expected to still fulfill grade level expectations. **Modifications** mean that the student is not responsible for all grade level material. For example, they may not need to know all the parts of a plant, but just distinguish between a plant and an animal. They are not responsible for all grade level material.
7. **State and District Assessments** that the student will be responsible for based on eligibility, the PLAAFP, and their individualized objectives.
8. **Consider Extended School Year (ESY) Services** if there is data that a student will not be able to recuperate their knowledge and skills within a state specified time period at the beginning of the school year.
9. **Related Services** such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, and counseling. It will also be decided how often, the amount of time, and location of where services will be provided. The services provided are based on educational need through assessments.

10. **Transportation:** Does the student require a special education bus with the additional support that is available?
11. **Determine services to be provided:**
- Classes/Where provided
 - Coordination between General and Special Education
 - Grading
12. **Determine Placement,** where the services will be delivered. This can be in a general education classroom, resource room, functional academic classroom, or a combination of any of these. The Placement Matrix at <http://www.texasprojectfirst.org/PlacementDecisions.html> can be used to guide decisions.
13. **Consider Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** means that students should be included as much as possible in the general education classroom with their peers on their home campus. General education settings with support should be considered before a more restrictive placement.
14. **Assurances or Effects of Removal from the General Education Classroom**
- Consider the opportunity to participate in school activities
 - Consider potential harmful effects
15. **ARD Committee members sign in agreement or disagreement.**
Agreement by consensus means that you agree with most of the plan and agree the plan should move forward. If the team as a whole supports the plan, then it is formally adopted and legally binding. If the parent agrees, but has reservations, you can work on those items with school personnel with the plan in place. There may also be an agreement to try some part of the plan on a trial basis. **If the parent formally disagrees, then the old plan remains in place. There will be a number of procedural safeguards triggered designed to gather additional information and another ARD**

scheduled. You will be given a copy of Procedural Rights and Safeguards.

You are allowed to request an ARD any time you have major concerns. Of course, you can also request teacher conferences to resolve minor issues and concerns. Everything does not have to be resolved in an ARD.

Data will be collected throughout the year on the goals and objectives to determine student progress. The goals and objectives should be mastered by the following year at the level indicated in the IEP.

You can check with your district to see if they have parent liaisons or special education parent representatives that would be available to clarify any questions that you have. They generally will not attend an ARD with you, but they have experience and can readily answer questions.

It is also a good idea to **begin a filing system or notebook** for all the information that you will be given over the years so it is readily accessible. You will want to keep copies of the ARD meeting, IEP goals and objectives, assessments, and progress reports.

Additional Resources:

http://www4.esc13.net/uploads/facilitatingIEPs/docs/SPED_ParentHandbook.pdf

The **Education Service Center** has created a **parent handbook to answer in simple terms commonly asked questions about special education and the process**. It contains:

- collection of basic information
- tips on how to make the process easier
- how to build collaboration and what is going on “behind the scenes” for educators

<http://framework.esc18.net/display/Webforms/LandingPage.aspx>

In English and Spanish you can find:

- Procedural Safeguards

- A Guide to the Admission, Review and Dismissal Process
- Side-by-side View of Special Education Rules and Regulations

<http://www.texasprojectfirst.org/SpecialEd101.html>

Offers more details on:

- the IEP Process,
- Special education evaluation and process
- ARD Agenda

http://www.thearcoftexas.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ARC_Idea

Links to a manual in English or Spanish to understand special education law