OREGON
OFFICE OF INDIAN EDUCATION

A GUIDE FOR INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

The Journey to a Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities

February 2026

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A Message for Indigenous Families

Dear Indigenous Families,

This guide was created to honor the sacred role you play in your child's life and learning. In Indigenous communities, education is not confined to classrooms—it is a lifelong journey shaped by relationships, cultural teachings, and the wisdom of extended family networks. Children are sacred, and their learning is a shared responsibility carried by parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins, and community members. Everyone has a role.

We know that navigating special education systems can feel overwhelming, especially when those systems don't always reflect your values, histories, or ways of knowing. But your perspective is essential. You carry deep insight into what motivates your child, what brings them joy, and what challenges them. That wisdom belongs at the center of every decision made about your child's education.

We also recognize the historical trauma that Native communities carry—the legacy of boarding schools, forced removal, and cultural erasure has left deep wounds. These experiences may shape how you engage with schools today. But trauma does not define us. Your resilience, humor, and love for our children are powerful medicines. Laughter is good medicine, and so is advocacy.

This guide is here to help you navigate the special education process with confidence and clarity. Whether you're attending an IEP meeting, reviewing an evaluation, or simply wondering what comes next, we hope this resource empowers you to speak up, ask questions, and ensure that your child's educational journey reflects who they are and where they come from.

You are not alone. You are part of a larger story—one of strength, healing, and cultural pride. Your child deserves an education that honors their identity, and you have the right, the wisdom, and the support to help make that happen.

As an Indigenous family member with a child in special education, it's important to remember that your child's individuality is a strength. In many Indigenous knowledge systems, each person carries unique gifts and a special purpose. Learning happens in many ways—through relationships, nature, and ancestral knowledge. Supporting your child's voice, identity, and sense of responsibility helps them grow in ways that are meaningful and connected.

Special education, when done right, is about giving your child the tools they need to succeed. It's not a label—it's a support system. Schools are required by law to partner with families to create plans that help students thrive. Your role is powerful, and your advocacy helps ensure that every part of your child's journey—from the first evaluation to graduation—is rooted in pride, purpose, and possibility.

Chapter 1.
Parent Involvement Is Essential

Eli is a bright and curious fourth-grader who loves drawing animals and listening to elders tell stories. He comes from a close-knit community where family and cultural traditions play a big role in his daily life. Though Eli is eager to learn, he has been struggling in school, especially with reading and math. His teachers have noticed that he often falls behind during lessons and has difficulty focusing for long periods. At home, his mom, Talia, is deeply concerned and wants to support him, but she is worried about Eli being incorrectly placed in special education and is unsure how to navigate the school system to get him the help he needs.

Overidentification of Native American students in special education

While special education is an essential educational service, it is not always applied correctly. For example, Native students are identified for special education services more than any other racial or ethnic group. Across the country, about 19 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students receive special education services. That's more than Black (17%), White (16%), or Hispanic (15%) students.[1] In fact, a Native student is about twice as likely as a White student to be identified for special education.[2]

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of American Indian and Alaska Native students receive special education services. That's more than Black (17%), White (16%), or Hispanic (15%) students.

There are many possible reasons for this. Sometimes, the way schools teach, test, or support students doesn't match the values or knowledge of Native families. When schools don't understand or respect those differences, they might wrongly put students into special education. Also, some teachers might have biases that affect their decisions without even knowing it. As a parent, you have the right to work closely with school staff members to ensure your child's educational needs are accurately identified and not based on cultural misunderstanding or bias.

[1] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database. National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2022–23. https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products

[2] National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2020). *Significant disproportionality in special education: Current trends and actions for impact.* https://ncld.org/?resources=in-vitae-turpis-massa

Historical context and boarding schools

For many Native families, mistrust of the education system is rooted in a long and painful history. For generations, Native children were taken from their homes and sent to government or church-run boarding schools that aimed to rid them of their languages, cultures, and ways of learning. These schools separated children from their families, communities, and traditional teachings, leaving deep wounds that are still felt today.

Because of this history many Native families have experienced schools as places of harm rather than support. It's understandable to feel cautious or unsure about engaging with school systems, especially when it comes to something as sensitive as special education.

But as a Native parent you also have powerful rights and cultural traditions. You are not alone, and you carry generations of love, protection, and knowledge that you can draw on to advocate for and support your child. Special education, when done well, can be a tool for healing and empowerment rather than a repeat of past harms or the cause of new ones. There are legal protections in place, such as those outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that are intended to help you look after your child's well-being and address their educational needs. As a parent, IDEA provides you with specific legal rights you can use to advocate for your child and participate in decisions about their education. This guide is intended to support you in understanding those rights and the steps you can take to ensure your child receives the services and support they deserve. Your involvement makes all the difference.

As an Indigenous family member, it is important that you use your voice to ensure your child is understood. This guide will help you speak up, ask the right questions, and make sure your child's culture and goals—however that looks in your family—stays central to their education experience.[3,4] The guide will show you the best ways to identify special education needs and what good support looks like, so you can make sure your student gets a fair and culturally appropriate education.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Kramarczuk Voulgarides, C., Fergus, E., & King Thorius, K. A. (2017). Pursuing equity: Disproportionality in special education and the reframing of technical solutions to address systemic inequities. *Review of Research in Education, 41*(1), 61–87.

Chapter 2.
Does My Student Have a Disability?

Talia knew the school had systems in place to support students like Eli and to help determine if a disability might be affecting his learning. She'd heard terms like MTSS and interventions but didn't fully understand what they meant or how they could help.

Systems of Student Support

When a student struggles academically or behaviorally, there are several steps that teachers and other school staff members can take to identify the possible problems and address them. In many schools and districts, these steps are carried out as part of a formal multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).

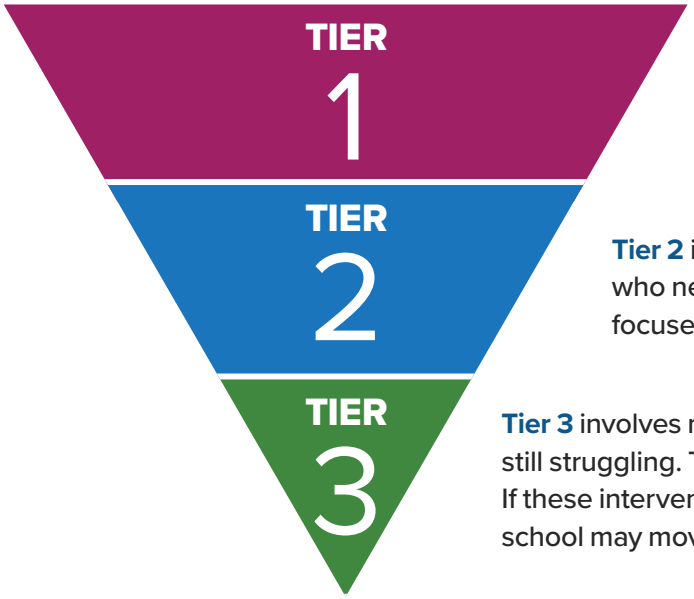
This system is explained in greater detail below, but the main thing to understand is that identification for special education services should always be part of an organized and well-documented process that has ruled out other possible causes and solutions for your child's struggles. You have a right to know what that process looks like.

In nearly all schools this process will involve a step in which students who are struggling are first offered interventions that are targeted to their specific needs. If these interventions do not work, school personnel then engage families in discussion about a possible disability. For any disability, it's important to ensure the student's struggles aren't due to a lack of effective instruction in reading or math or because they have limited English skills. For each specific learning disability (SLD), schools also need to rule out other factors, such as eyesight, hearing, or motor disabilities; intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

MTSS is not the only way to do this—and your school may not use it by name—but it is the most common. Understanding the basic elements of an MTSS will help you ensure that the school has made every effort to accurately identify and address your child's needs.

Multi-tiered system of supports and their role in disability identification

MTSS helps schools give students the support they need based on data and interventions delivered with increasing levels of intensity. The levels in MTSS are often referred to as "tiers":



Tier 1 is simply the support and instruction provided to all students. It is the foundation of learning.

Tier 2 involves targeted support for students who need extra help. This typically involves more focused instruction delivered in small groups.

Tier 3 involves more intensive support for students who are still struggling. This often includes one-on-one interventions. If these interventions do not result in adequate progress, the school may move forward with a special education referral.

Schools give a wide variety of assessments throughout the year to ensure students are making academic progress at their grade level. Based on this information, students may be assigned specific interventions that are aligned to an MTSS tier. Throughout the year, the school staff will keep an eye on each student's progress to make sure the instruction and level of support are working. This is called progress monitoring.

For example, if a student is getting Tier 2 support and not making the progress the school and family think is appropriate for that grade level, the school might decide to provide more intense support as called for in Tier 3, such as providing one-on-one or more frequent or longer sessions. Throughout this support, they monitor progress and adjust as needed.

Questions to ask if your child is receiving MTSS support

Schools don't have to tell families if a student is getting MTSS support, but they should. If your child is receiving MTSS support, here are some things you should ask:

Decision Process. How did they decide to give your child extra support? If you weren't involved, why?

Support Plan. Details about the support, including:

- What kind of support will be provided and is there evidence that it works?
- What kind of support can be provided at home, and how can the school support you in providing it?
- Is the plan culturally responsive to your family and community?
- What is the schedule for the support? When will it be delivered and for how long?
- What will your child miss compared to classmates who are not receiving this extra support?
- How often will your child's progress be measured and what tools will be used to do so?
- What are the goals for your child, benchmarks for progress, and signs that adjustments might be needed?
- How and how often will you be informed about your child's progress?

Implementation Monitoring. How will the school ensure the support plan is followed as planned?

It's important that you receive regular updates on your child's progress. The school should be working with you to help your child succeed. Deciding exactly what your student's progress and growth should look like can be challenging. This is the role of the school: to decide what the performance goals are, and what levels of performance would have them provide more intensive support or move toward an evaluation for special education. Be sure to make it known to the school you want to be informed of their decisions and that their decisions need to be explained clearly and based on data they can share with you.

Note: No matter what kind of disability is suspected, **parents and guardians have the right to request an initial evaluation at any time.** Schools cannot use the need for a child to go through an MTSS or other tiered system as a reason to deny or delay a full and individual evaluation for a child suspected of having a disability. An MTSS is meant to serve as a powerful tool for meeting each student's individual needs—not as a barrier to doing so..

As mentioned above, it's crucial to confirm that a student's struggles aren't due to a lack of effective teaching. MTSS is a formal process that involves teachers and other school staff members working in teams to regularly monitor student progress, review data, assign interventions, and adjust as necessary. This is designed to ensure that a lack of effective instruction is not the problem.

If your child is receiving additional support through an MTSS and still not showing progress, it is your right to ask questions about the kinds of interventions being provided and any adjustments that have been made. It is also your right to have access to progress monitoring results. Ultimately, you should have a strong role in the decision to investigate—through a special education referral process—whether a disability is contributing to your child's struggles. This decision should never be made by the school alone.

Chapter 3.
Referral to Evaluation

Talia grew increasingly concerned about Eli's progress in school and wanted to explore what additional supports might be available, but she wasn't sure what her rights were as a parent or how to advocate for him.

Your right to request an evaluation

If you think a disability might be affecting your child's learning or participation in the classroom, you can ask for a special education evaluation at any time. This is the first step in determining whether your child needs the kind of extra help provided for free under your state's special education laws.

Schools have a set process to follow in making this determination, which is described below. As you navigate this process, it's important to know that determining whether a child has a disability isn't always easy. Some disabilities—like blindness or deafness—are more obvious. Others, such as learning disabilities or emotional problems, can be very difficult to detect.

Due to this difficulty, determining whether a child qualifies for special education services can sometimes seem confusing or inconsistent from one school to another. That's why it's so important for you, as a Native family member or caregiver, to be involved in every step. Your observations, ideas, and concerns about your child are very important and provide essential context to the school. You have the right to ask questions, review data and other documentation, and make sure your child is treated fairly.

The special education referral process

The special education referral process starts when either the school or the family sends a formal referral letter. Only parents/guardians or designated school staff members can make this referral. Regardless of who sends the letter, an evaluation cannot take place until you give your consent.[5]

Once you provide consent to move forward with the referral, the school will then send you an official referral letter. Once the official referral is made, **the school has 90 days to complete the evaluation.**

You will also receive a copy of the procedural safeguards once the referral is made. This document explains your rights as a parent/guardian during this process. It includes the following key elements:

- **Independent educational evaluations.** You have the right to request a second opinion from an outside evaluator.

[5] Wettach, J. R. (2017). *A parent's guide to special education in North Carolina*. Children's Law Clinic, Duke Law School.

- **Prior written notice.** The school must give you written notice before making any decisions about your child's education.
- **Parent/guardian consent.** Evaluations and some services require your formal permission.
- **Access to education records.** You have the right to see your child's school records.
- **Complaints and disputes.** You have the right to file a complaint or dispute a decision, and there are specific timeliness and steps to follow.
- **Mediation.** There is a mediation process for resolving complaints or disputes.
- **Placement during complaints.** There are several possible educational settings in which your child could be placed while any complaints are being addressed.
- **Special placement procedures.** The school must follow specific procedures if your child is placed in a different educational setting.
- **Private school placement.** You have the right to enroll your child in a private school, and there is a process to follow.
- **Due process hearings.** There is a process for resolving legal disputes about your child's education.
- **State appeals.** You have the right to appeal decisions at the state level, if applicable.
- **Civil actions.** You can take legal action if needed.
- **Attorney's fees.** You may qualify to have legal fees paid.

The procedural safeguards document is there to make sure you understand your rights and how the process works, so you can be fully involved and informed every step of the way.

Procedural safeguards must be provided, at minimum, once per year to parents/guardians

Once the official referral letter has been sent, the school will conduct an initial referral meeting. This meeting, at minimum, will include you (the family), your child's teachers, and the school principal. Additionally, as a parent or caregiver, you have the right to invite individuals to your child's IEP meeting who know your child well and can contribute to building a strong, culturally grounded education plan. This may include kinship caregivers, Tribal elders, cultural mentors, or medical providers who have worked closely with your child. To support transparency and help the school prepare effectively, it's helpful to notify them in advance about who will be joining you.

The purpose of this meeting is to confirm the decision to move forward with the referral for evaluation. Once the decision is made to start the evaluation process, the first step is to see if your child's challenges fit into one of 12 categories used for special education eligibility (see link and appendix B for a detailed description

of these categories). These categories are defined by law and help schools determine if special education services are appropriate. This decision will help guide what kind of information will be collected during the evaluation. Note: These categories are not intended to define your child; they simply help the school determine the best way to provide support.

The 12 eligibility categories are:

1. Autism Spectrum Disorder
2. Communication Disorder (including speech or language challenges)
3. Deaf-Blindness
4. Developmental Delay (used for children ages 3–9)
5. Emotional Disturbance (ED)
6. Hearing Impairment
7. Intellectual Disability
8. Orthopedic Impairment (physical disabilities)
9. Other Health Impairment (OHI) (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] or medical conditions that affect learning)
10. Specific Learning Disability (SLD) (such as dyslexia or difficulty with math)
11. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
12. Visual Impairment

It's also possible that, after the meeting, the group may decide not to move forward with the evaluation. If that happens, it doesn't mean the school won't provide extra support for your child. The goal should always be to come up with an individualized plan to help your child succeed. It simply means that the process to identify a disability and provide special education services will not continue at that time.

If you disagree with the decision not to continue the evaluation, you have the right to challenge it. The law gives parents/guardians several options for resolving disagreements, including:

Mediation. Engaging a neutral third party to help resolve the issue.

Complaint resolution. Filing a formal complaint to resolve the issue.

Due process complaint/ hearing request. Requesting a legal hearing to resolve the issue.

You have the right to advocate for your child and can use these processes to ensure your voice is heard.

More information can be found on the Oregon Department of Education's Dispute Resolution website.[6]

[6] Oregon Department of Education Dispute Resolution. https://www.oregon.gov/ode/rules-and-policies/pages/dispute-resolution.aspx

Evaluation and eligibility meeting

If the decision is made to move forward with the referral, you'll need to sign a consent form to allow the evaluation to begin.[7] As noted above, the school has 90 days from the referral to complete the evaluation. Once the evaluation is completed, the school will set up an eligibility meeting.

At this meeting, you and the school staff will go over the evaluation report and compare the findings to the criteria for the disability categories in Oregon. The goal of this meeting is to decide whether there's enough evidence to show that your child qualifies for a disability under one of those categories. See appendix D for a list of key elements to look for in the evaluation report.

If the decision is "yes," the school will need your informed consent again before they can start providing special education services. **If the decision is "no" and you don't agree with it, you still have the right to challenge the decision and pursue dispute resolution.**

[7] Wettach, J. R. (2017). *A parent's guide to special education in North Carolina.* Children's Law Clinic, Duke Law School.

Chapter 4. Developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

As a result of Talia's advocacy Eli was identified as having a disability. As she learned, the next step was to create an ***individualized education program (IEP)*** *for Eli. An IEP is designed to ensure your child can make progress in school, and the law requires that it must be effective in helping your child succeed. This means the IEP must be specific to your child's needs, progress must be checked regularly, and if your child isn't making the expected progress, the IEP should be changed to better support them.*

IEP team members and roles

The IEP is developed by a team that includes:

- You, as the parent/guardian
- At least one of your child's regular education teachers
- Your child's special education case manager
- A representative from the school district who is knowledgeable about special education and the resources available at the school
- At the discretion of you or the school, other people who know your child well or have special expertise (for example, related service providers)
- When appropriate, your child may also be included on the team. Starting at age 14, your child is invited to the IEP meeting, but they don't have to attend if they don't want to.[8]

Before the IEP meeting, make sure you receive and review a copy of the **procedural safeguards—** this document explains your rights and the process in detail.

[8] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (2006, October 4). *IEP team meetings and changes to the IEP.*

IEP meetings and updates

The IEP team meets at least once a year to review your child's progress and make updates to the plan as needed. However, you can request a formal IEP meeting at any time if you feel your child needs a review or change to their plan. In most cases, any changes to the IEP must be discussed and agreed upon in an IEP meeting. Additionally, you have the right to request informal meetings with the school at any time to discuss your child's progress.

Every three years, your child's IEP and disability status must be fully reevaluated unless you and the school agree that this is not necessary. This reevaluation helps ensure that the IEP continues to meet your child's needs. It can also indicate your child is no longer in need of Special Education.

IEP components explained

Table 1 outlines the minimum required elements of an IEP. The standard template for an IEP in Oregon can be found on the Oregon Department of Education website.[9]

Table 1. IEP required components

Component	Content
Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP, described in more detail below)	These statements describe the student's current skill level and how their disability affects their learning.
Challenging, ambitious, and measurable goals	These goals establish what the student should achieve in school in a year. They help the IEP team determine whether the student is learning and whether the program is helping.
Description of special education and related services and supplementary services (see table 2 for additional explanation)	This explains all the school services that will help the student reach their annual goals. These services should be based on research and provided—to the greatest extent appropriate for your child—with their non-disabled peers. This is often referred to as the least restrictive environment (LRE).
Method for measuring and reporting progress	This explains how the student's progress will be measured and how and when the school will tell the family about the progress (for example, quarterly reports, report cards).

[9] Oregon Department of Education Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Policy Overview. https://www.oregon.gov/ode/rules-and-policies/pages/idea-policy.aspx

Component	Content
Explanation of the extent to which the student will *not* be educated with nondisabled students in the general education setting	While awkward, this requirement is written this way on purpose. Special education law requires the IEP team to explain any decision that takes the student out of the general education setting.
Statement of student's participation in state and district-wide assessments	This includes how much the student will participate in state and district-wide testing.
The date of service initiation, frequency, duration, location	This defines the date that special education and related services in the IEP will begin; the frequency (for example, times per week) and duration (for example, length of each session) of the services; and the location where the services will be provided. Note: Location cannot be decided until all other aspects of an IEP are decided.
Transition services (beginning not later than IEP in effect at age 16, see chapter 5)	This describes measurable goals for post-high school based on age-appropriate assessments related to training, education, jobs, and, if needed, independent living skills, as well as the transition services (including courses) needed to help the child reach those goals.

Source: The IRIS Center. (2019). *IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs.* https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/

In addition to these requirements, beginning no later than one year before the student reaches the age when they are legally considered an adult under state law (for example, age 18 in Oregon), the IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of their rights under IDEA.

Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP)

Here is what should be included in your students PLAAFP (see appendix E for an example and additional information:

1. **Statement of student needs including:**
    - The student's strengths
    - The main areas of concern (for example academic, behavioral) and how do these concerns relate to district or state standards and benchmarks and the student's postsecondary interests
    - The family members' concerns
    - The student's instructional preferences
    - The results from the evaluation (for example, standardized tests, progress monitoring data)
    - Ways in which the student's strengths can help address the identified areas of concern

> Note: The IEP is not a form document. It is constructed only after careful consideration of the child's **present levels of achievement,** disability, and potential for growth.
>
> – Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1, 580 U.S. ____, 137 S. Ct. 988 (2017), p. 14

2. **Information describing how the student's disability affects:**
    - Involvement in general education
    - Access to the general education curriculum
    - Progress in the general education curriculum

3. **The student's current level of performance:**
    - These data should be aligned to areas of concern/need and tied to state content standards

Challenging, ambitious, and measurable goals. The IEP includes goals that describe what the student is to achieve in a given school year. The goals should be directly aligned to the PLAAFP. Effective goals have the following characteristics. We have included appropriate questions to ask about each characteristic. These questions are intended to help you serve as an effective member of your child's IEP team.

The goals are meaningful

- Is the skill the goal represents necessary for success in current and future environments?
- Does the family believe the accomplishment of the goal is important?
- Does the goal specify a level of performance and an expectation that is reasonable?

The goals can be measured

- Is the outcomes easily defined?
- Can the outcome be observed and counted?
- Are there multiple increments in performance between the present level of academic achievement and functional performance and the criteria stated in the measurable annual goal?

The goals can be monitored

- Is the goal written in a way that allows for frequent and repeated monitoring to determine whether the student is progressing?
- Does the goal involve the collection of data that can be used to determine the effectiveness of the overall IEP?
- Can progress monitoring results related to the goals be used to inform both short-term instructional adjustments and ongoing assessment?

The goals are guided by grade-level content standards

Goals must be aligned to the state's academic standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled.

- Are the goals more than a simple restatement of the relevant grade-level standards in the state?
- Are the goals focused on the specific skills in which the student needs to grow, in addition to addressing the relevant grade-level standards?

An IEP can include short-term objectives related to the overall goals. These objectives provide benchmarks to help monitor a student's progress toward the overall goals. Short-term objectives are only required for students who qualify to take an alternative to the annual statewide assessment, but they can be included for any student. (See appendix F for examples of high-quality IEP goals.)

Special education/specially designed instruction

Specially designed instruction (SDI) is often described as *"what makes special education special."* It's the customized teaching your child receives that's specifically designed to meet their unique needs due to their disability. The goal of SDI is to help your child access the general curriculum—what all students are learning—and work toward the same state educational standards, but with the necessary supports in place. SDI involves teaching that will mitigate the impact of the student's disability on their learning and result in achieving one or more of the student's IEP goals. The IEP should clearly spell out:

- What exactly the SDI includes
- Who will be doing the teaching
- When and where the instruction will happen
- How often and for how long it will be provided

Here are some important things to understand about SDI:

It's different from what other students are getting in the classroom—it's personalized

It's about what the teacher does, not what the student is expected to do on their own

It focuses directly on the skills your child needs to improve in order to meet their IEP goals—skills they may be missing because of their disability

It's about more than repeating the regular class material in a different way

It's about more than helping your child finish their homework

It's about more than having another adult in the room

SDI is intentional, meaningful instruction created just for your child—because your child deserves the support they need to succeed.

Related services and supplementary aids and services

Related services are generally focused on a student's primary needs rather than those that are explicitly school-related. The most common examples are speech-language and physical/occupational therapy. Other examples may include audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, therapeutic recreation, counseling services, orientation and mobility services, medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes, school health (including school nurse services), social work services in schools, and family member counseling and training. Additionally, culturally specific support provided by the Tribe may also qualify as a related service. Additional information on related supports can be found on the ODE American Indian/Alaska Native Education website. Related services are typically provided outside the classroom.

Supplementary Aids and Services (SAS) are services in support of learning and are typically provided in the classroom. The most common forms of SAS are accommodations and modifications. An accommodation is a change in educational environment or practice designed to help students overcome the challenges presented by their disabilities. A modification is a change in what students are expected to learn or what a test is expected to measure. Examples of accommodations and modifications are provided in table 2. (See appendix G for additional information.)

Table 2. Example accommodations and modifications

Accommodations	Modifications
Presentation accommodations (changes the way information is presented) • Listen to audio recordings instead of reading text • Learn content from audiobooks, movies, videos, or digital media instead of reading print versions • Work with fewer items per page or line • Work with text in a larger print size • Have a "designated reader" — someone who reads test questions aloud to the student • Hear instructions spoken aloud • Record a lesson, instead of taking notes • Get class notes from another student • See an outline of a lesson • Use visual presentations of verbal material, such as word webs • Get a written list of instructions	**Assignment modifications** • Complete different homework problems than peers • Answer different test questions • Create alternate projects or assignments
Response accommodations (changes the way students complete assignments or tests) • Give responses in a form (spoken or written) that's easier for them • Dictate answers to a scribe who writes or types • Capture responses on an audio recorder • Use a spelling dictionary or digital spellchecker • Use a word processor to type notes or give answers in class • Use a calculator or table of "math facts"	**Curriculum modifications** • Learn different material (such as continuing to work on multiplication while classmates move on to fractions) • Get graded or assessed using a different standard than other students • Be excused from particular projects
Setting accommodations • Work or take a test in a different setting, such as a quiet room with few distractions • Sit where they learn best (for example, near the teacher) • Use special lighting or acoustics • Take a test in a small group setting • Use sensory tools such as an exercise band that can be looped around a chair's legs (so fidgety kids can kick it and quietly get their energy out)	N/A

Accommodations	Modifications
Timing accommodations • Take more time to complete a task or a test • Have extra time to process spoken information and directions • Take frequent breaks, such as after completing a worksheet	N/A
Scheduling accommodations • Take more time to complete a project • Take a test in several timed sessions or over several days • Take sections of a test in a different order • Take a test at a specific time of day	N/A
Organization skills accommodations • Use an alarm to help with time management • Mark texts with a highlighter • Use a planner or organizer to help coordinate assignments • Receive study skills instruction	N/A

Source: Morin, A. (n.d.). *Common accommodations and modifications in school.* Understood for All. https://www.understood.org/en/articles/common-classroom-accommodations-and-modifications

Method for measuring and reporting progress

Every IEP should clearly explain how your child's progress toward their goals will be tracked and how often that progress will be measured and shared with you. During the IEP meeting, the team will decide how often you'll receive these updates. These progress reports are meant to keep you informed about how things are going and what the school plans to do if your child isn't making the expected progress toward their goals.

Typically, schools send these progress updates at the same time as regular report cards. When you receive these reports, they should:

- Be written in clear, easy-to-understand language (no confusing education jargon)
- Include graphs and other visuals to help show your child's progress
- Be provided in your home language whenever possible
- Clearly state whether your child is on track to meet their annual IEP goals

These reports are an important part of making sure your child's IEP is working. If your child isn't making enough progress, the school should let you know what changes they plan to make to provide more effective support.

Explanation of the extent to which the student will not be educated with nondisabled students in the general education setting

The law requires that students with disabilities be educated with their nondisabled peers, as much as is appropriate. Students with disabilities should only be taught separately from their classmates without disabilities if their disability is so severe that they can't learn well in regular classes, even with extra help.[10] The IEP must state the amount of time a student will be educated in the general setting and any time they will be educated outside of the general setting. This means any time they are removed from a setting that is not offered to their peers who do not have disabilities, it must be documented in the IEP.

Participation in statewide assessments

Most students in special education will take the same general state tests that all students are required to take. Oregon does offer an alternative assessment called the Oregon Extended Assessment (OExt). This assessment is for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The Oregon Department of Education offers a guide providing decision-making guidance related to participation in statewide assessments.[11] There are three key decision points, each of which must be present to determine if a student is eligible:

1. Does the student show major disabilities in learning academic content and have trouble with everyday skills?
2. Does significant cognitive disability impact the student's access to the general education curriculum and require individualized instruction?
3. Does significant cognitive disability impact the student's post-school outcomes?

The date of service initiation, frequency, duration, location

This defines the date that special education and related services in the IEP will begin; the frequency (for example, times per week) and duration (for example, length of each session) of the services; and the location where the services will be provided. Note: Location cannot be decided until all other aspects of an IEP are decided.

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[10] Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 34 CFR §300.114(a)(2).

[11] Oregon Department of Education Oregon Extended Assessment https://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/assessment/altassessment/pages/default.aspx

Chapter 5. Transition Services: Planning for Life After High School

Talia knew that as Eli progressed through school, she would need to pay special attention to planning for his life after high school. She had heard that receiving special education services could provide additional support in this area, but she wasn't sure what those services included or how they might influence his path through elementary, middle, high school, and beyond.

Transition Planning as a Part of Special Education

If your child has an IEP, the school must start transition planning—which is all about helping your child prepare for life after high school—by the time they turn 16. It's actually a great idea to start even earlier.

There are two big parts to transition planning that will be written into your child's IEP:

1. **Postsecondary goals –** These are goals for life after high school (such as going to college, getting a job, or living independently).
2. **Transition services –** These are supports that help your child reach those goals. They might include career counseling, job experiences, or help learning daily living skills.

The Oregon Department of Education offers a Transition Resource Handbook[12] for additional support.

Oregon diploma options

A big part of transition planning is figuring out which type of high school diploma your child will work toward. Oregon offers three diploma options:

1. Oregon standard diploma
2. Oregon modified diploma
3. Oregon extended diploma

(See table 3 for a side-by-side comparison of the credit requirements for each option.)

The standard diploma. All students in Oregon can work toward the standard diploma, and that's the most common goal. Special education is designed to support students in working toward the same academic expectations as their peers. The goal for most students with IEPs is to earn a standard diploma with the right supports and accommodations in place.

[12] Oregon Transition Resource Handbook https://transitionoregon.org/transition-resources/

The modified diploma. If your child has tried their best, received all accommodations and modifications you believe necessary, and still isn't able to meet all the requirements for the standard diploma, they may be eligible for the modified diploma. The modified diploma still requires 24 credits but allows for a different path or course of study.

Some things to know about the modified diploma:

It's still considered a regular high school diploma

Most four-year colleges do not accept it

Most community colleges accept it

Trade school acceptance can vary

Native students in Oregon are 2.3 times more likely to receive a modified diploma. Knowing that receiving a modified diploma can limit your child's outcomes after graduation,[13] it's important to start thinking about diploma options early, because even the classes your child takes in middle school can impact which diploma they're eligible to receive.

The IEP team can recommend the modified diploma as early as grade 6, but no later than two years before your child is expected to graduate. **Most importantly, a school cannot place your child on the modified diploma path without your consent.**

The extended diploma. The third option is the extended diploma. This is for students who have significant learning and instructional challenges and for whom the standard or modified diploma just aren't the right fit, even with support. The extended diploma only requires 12 credits. While this diploma does provide a certificate of high school completion, it may impact a student's eligibility for postsecondary options, including the military.

Like the modified diploma, parental consent is required before placing a student on this path. The decision should be made as part of the transition planning process.

Here are some examples of when a student might be eligible for the extended diploma:

- **Instructional barrier.** A student has severe anxiety or panic attacks that regularly prevent them from attending or participating in school, even with support
- **Instructional barrier.** A student can only understand very concrete ideas and struggles with abstract thinking, making it very difficult to succeed in subjects like math and science

[13] Oregon Department of Education. (2025). American Indian/Alaska Native students in Oregon: A review of key indicators. https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/SB13%20Curriculum/AIAN%20Students%20in%20Oregon%20A%20Review%20of%20Key%20Indicators%202023-24.pdf

- **Significant learning barrier.** A student has a learning disability in math that limits their ability to go beyond a certain grade level, even with a lot of support and accommodations

A student can be placed on the extended diploma path as late as their final year of school.

What if a diploma is not the best option? (Certificate of Attendance)

Senate Bill 992 (2023) updated the statutory requirements related to high school completion with the removal of the alternative certificate as a high school completion option. It was created by SB 992 as something that may be awarded to a student when the requirements for the Oregon Diploma, a modified Oregon Diploma, or an Oregon Extended Diploma have not been met.[14]

A Certificate of Attendance is given to students who attend high school full time for at least four years starting in 9th grade and who meet other requirements set by their school district. This certificate shows that a student participated in school, but it is not the same as earning a high school diploma. Students who receive a Certificate of Attendance are not counted as high school graduates in state or district reports and cannot list it as a diploma when applying for jobs, the military, college, training programs, or financial aid. Families are encouraged to talk with their IEP team about how this option fits with their student's future goals.

No matter what path your child is on, the goal is always the same: to set them up for a successful and meaningful future after high school. And the earlier the planning starts, the better. You are an essential part of this process, and your voice and consent matter at every step.

Table 3. Credit requirements for the three diploma options in Oregon

Academic subject	Standard diploma required credits	Modified diploma required credits	Extended diploma required credits
English/language arts	4	3	2
Mathematics	3	2	2
Science	3	2	2
Social sciences	3	2	3
Physical education	1	1	1
Health education	1	1	1
World languages/Arts/Career and technical education (CTE)	3	1	1
Electives	6	12	—
TOTAL	**24**	**24**	**12**

[14] Oregon Department of Education (n.d.) Certificates for School Completion: Questions and Answers Related to the Implementation of SB 992. https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/SpecialEducation/SecondaryTransition/Documents/Certificates%20for%20School%20CompletionFAQ.pdf

Chapter 6.
Discipline and Student Protection

One afternoon, Talia received a call from the school: Eli had been suspended for "non-compliance and disrespect" after refusing to read aloud in class. Talia was shocked. She understood that all students, including those with disabilities, are expected to follow school rules. But she also recalled hearing that students with disabilities may be entitled to additional protections when it comes to disciplinary actions, and she wasn't sure what those were or how they applied to Eli.

The answer is, school administrators can use the same discipline procedures for students with disabilities, except in cases of "exclusionary discipline." Exclusionary discipline is when the school decides to remove the student from their typical education setting, such as in-school or out-of-school suspension or expulsion. In instances of exclusionary discipline, there are special protections in place to make sure students with disabilities are treated fairly.[15] For Native families this is especially important. Native students with disabilities experience exclusionary discipline more frequently than any other group of students in Oregon and at almost twice the rate of non-Native students.[16]

Your child may experience different kinds of exclusionary discipline. Two common types are short- and long-term suspensions. It's important to note that "in-school" suspension is still considered a removal from school. Schools may also "informally" remove a student as a form of discipline. For example, if a student was sent to sit outside in the hall or in the principal's office for a period during a day, this is an informal removal for discipline. **While informal, this change of educational environment is in violation of a student's IEP and should be considered as a removal.**

Short-term suspensions (10 days or less). If a student with a disability is suspended or removed from school for 10 school days or fewer within a single school year, the school can use the same discipline process as they would for any student. Note: The 10-day total does not have to be for a single incident—it is the total number of days of exclusion in a single school year. Once the total number of days of exclusion goes beyond 10, the rules change.

[15] Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, Part B Regulations, 34 C.F.R. § 300.530 (2004b).

[16] Oregon Department of Education. (2025). American Indian/Alaska Native students in Oregon: A review of key indicators. https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/SB13%20Curriculum/AIAN%20Students%20in%20Oregon%20A%20Review%20of%20Key%20Indicators%202023-24.pdf

Long-term suspensions (more than 10 days). When a student is removed from school for more than 10 total days, it's considered a "change of placement." That means the student is not only being disciplined, they're being removed from the learning environment that was agreed upon in their IEP. This kind of change can only be made by the student's IEP team, so the team must meet to talk about what happened.

At this meeting, the IEP team will do two important things:

1. **Review the current placement:** If the team decides the student's current placement isn't appropriate, the student must be placed back in a setting that better supports their needs.
2. **Conduct a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR):** This is where the team decides if the behavior that led to the discipline was directly related to the student's disability.
    a. **If the behavior *was* related to the disability,** the school cannot continue using typical discipline measures. Instead, the school must:
        i. Conduct a **Functional Behavior Assessment,** if one hasn't been done already
        ii. Create or revise a **Behavior Intervention Plan** to help prevent the behavior from happening again
    b. **If the behavior was *not* related,** the school can follow its regular discipline procedures. However, the student still has the right to receive the special education services outlined in their IEP.

What about repeated short-term suspensions?

If your child is suspended multiple times in a school year for shorter periods (like 2–3 days here and there), and those suspensions add up to more than 10 days total, the school is required to stop and look at the big picture.

The IEP team must decide whether the pattern of exclusions adds up to a change in placement. If so, they must follow the same steps as they would for a longer suspension, reviewing the placement and conducting an MDR if needed.

Special situations: weapons, drugs, or serious injury

There are three serious behaviors that allow a school to immediately place a student in a different setting, even if the behavior is related to the student's disability:

- Bringing a weapon to school
- Using, possessing, or selling drugs at school
- Causing serious physical injury to someone at school

In any of these cases, the school can place the student in an Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES) for up to 45 school days. During that time, the student must continue receiving their special education services, including specially designed instruction.

The school must also:

- Hold an MDR within 10 days of the disciplinary action
- If the behavior is found to be related to the student's disability, the school still needs to:
    - Complete or update a Functional Behavior Assessment
    - Create or revise a Behavior Intervention Plan

Even if the student stays in the alternative setting, these supports must be put in place to help the student be successful and avoid future problems.[17,18] The Oregon Department of Education provides additional information regarding discipline on their website.[19]

What to do if your child is disciplined

If your child with a disability is facing school discipline, especially suspension or removal from school, you have rights. These legal protections are in place to make sure students are supported, not just punished, and that their disability is considered when decisions are made.

It's also important to understand that a child's behavior may be influenced not only by their disability but also by what's happening in their home or community. Life circumstances such as the death of a close family member, divorce or separation of caregivers, housing instability, a parent's incarceration, or even the arrival of a new sibling can create stress, grief, or anxiety that shows up at school as withdrawal, frustration, or challenging behavior. These are human responses to life's ever-changing circumstances and should not be seen as evidence that your child is "bad" or "has a behavior problem."

As a parent, guardian, or caregiver, you are not alone, and you are not powerless. You have the right to be part of the conversation when your child is disciplined, to ask for a review of whether their behavior is connected to their disability, and to ensure the school is providing the support your child needs, not just consequences. Your insight into your child's life and experiences is essential. You are your child's most important advocate, and your voice can help guide the school toward understanding, healing, and meaningful solutions.

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[17] Yell, M. L., & Rozalski, M. E. (2008). The impact of legislation and litigation on discipline and student behavior in the classroom. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 52*(3), 7–16. doi:10.3200/PSFL.52.3.7-16

[18] Ryan, J. B., Katsiyannis, A., Peterson, R., & Chmelar, R. (2007). IDEA 2004 and disciplining students with disabilities. *NASSP Bulletin, 91,* 130–140.

[19] Oregon Department of Education School Discipline In Oregon https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/pages/schooldiscipline.aspx

Chapter 7.
IEP vs 504 Plans

Maria was the mother of a child who had been struggling in school due to ADHD. She wanted to find the right kind of support for Daniel but wasn't sure where to start. As she learned more, Maria discovered that not all students with disabilities need specialized instruction. In some cases, there's another option: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

A 504 plan can help any child whose disability affects things like reading, playing, or paying attention. Unlike special education/an IEP, a 504 plan **doesn't include special teaching.** Instead, it's about adjusting the learning environment or providing things like assistive technology (for example, hearing aids, glasses, or voice-to-text tools, see table 4 for a comparison chart). Schools will evaluate your child to see if they qualify, and you'll need to give permission for that evaluation.

All 504 plans are flexible: They can change as needed. For example, if your child broke both arms, they could have a 504 plan while they're healing, but once they're better, the plan would no longer be necessary. The big difference between special education and a 504 plan is that the latter do not include specialized instruction or teaching.

Table 4. IEP vs 504 plan

Feature	IEP	504 Plan
Law	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
Eligibility	Student must meet specific criteria under one of the disability categories defined by law	Student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities
Specialized Instruction and Modifications	✓ Yes	✗ No
Accommodations	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
Team Involvement	Developed by a team including parents, teachers, specialists, and district representatives	Typically developed by school staff members with input from parents
Progress Monitoring	Requires measurable annual goals and regular progress reports	No formal progress monitoring required

Feature	IEP	504 Plan
Transition Planning	Required by age 16	Not required
Parental Consent for Evaluation	Required	Required

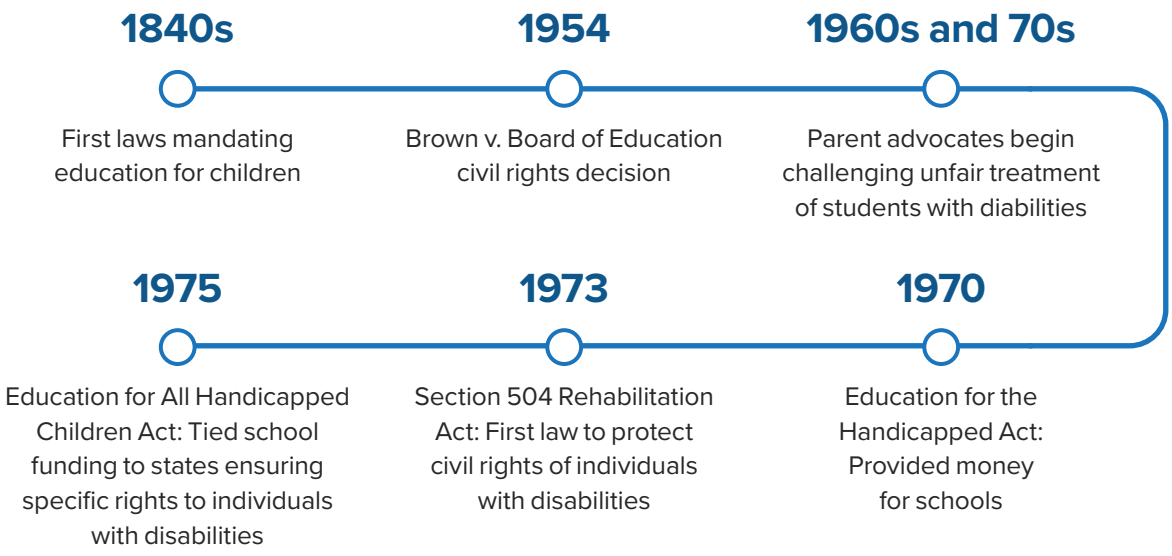
Conclusion

Special education is not just paperwork; it honors your child's gifts, family wisdom, and culture. As an Indigenous parent or caregiver, you carry generations of knowledge, strength, and advocacy. Your voice is essential in shaping your child's educational journey. By staying informed, asking questions, and sharing your family's values and traditions, you help ensure that your child's learning plan reflects who they are, not just as a student, but as a whole person rooted in culture and community. You are your child's most powerful advocate, and your presence at the table helps schools move beyond compliance toward true partnership, respect, and belonging. Your child deserves an education that uplifts their identity, honors their heritage, and prepares them to thrive, and you have the right and the wisdom to help make that happen.

Appendix A. A Brief History of Education for Students with Disabilities

Public schools have existed in the United States since at least the 19th century, but it wasn't until the 1970s that students with disabilities were guaranteed the right to learn alongside their peers. Before then, many children with disabilities weren't allowed to attend school at all. Families had to fight hard to change that (figure A1).

Figure A1. Historical milestones for special education



Source: A History of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History

In the 1960s and 70s, inspired by the civil rights movement and a major court case called Brown v. Board of Education (1954), families and advocates began challenging the unfair treatment of students with disabilities. Still, as recently as 1969, some courts allowed schools to exclude students if officials believed they wouldn't benefit from school or might be "too disruptive."

Real change finally began in 1970, when the federal government passed the Education for the Handicapped Act, which provided money to help schools educate certain students with disabilities. Then, in 1973, the Rehabilitation Act introduced Section 504, the first law to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities. It made it illegal for any program that receives federal funding, including schools, to discriminate against individuals with disabilities.

In 1975 Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which gave states money to help educate students with disabilities—but only if they agreed to follow rules that protected students and families. This law required schools to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to every student with a disability.

This law gave students and families several important rights:

- Fair testing and evaluation processes that are not biased
- Education in settings with their non-disabled peers as much as possible (called the least restrictive environment)
- Involvement of Indigenous family members in every step of the process
- A free education, just like every other student
- A learning plan tailored to the child's individual strengths and needs

These plans became known as individualized education programs (IEPs). Each IEP outlines the student's goals, services, school placement, length of the school year, and how progress will be measured.

In 1990, the law's name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It was updated again in 1997 to include new protections, especially related to school discipline for students with disabilities (see chapter 7 of this guide for more on that topic).

Thanks to these laws—and to the families and advocates who made them possible—students with disabilities now have the right to learn, grow, and be supported in school.

Appendix B.
Oregon Disability Identification Categories

Disability category	Official definition[20]	Common language definition
Autism	A developmental disability that includes persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts; restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. Characteristics are generally evident before age 3 but may not become fully evident until social demands exceed limited capacities or may be masked by learned strategies. Characteristics cause educationally and developmentally significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance. However, a child who qualifies for special education under the category of autism spectrum disorder may also have an emotional disturbance as a secondary disability if the child meets the criteria under emotional disturbance.	Autism is a developmental disability that affects how a person communicates and interacts with others. It also includes repetitive behaviors and interests. These traits usually show up before age 3 but might not be obvious until social demands are too much or might be hidden by learned behaviors. Autism can cause big problems in social, work, or other important areas of life.
Communication Disorder	The impairment of speech articulation, voice, fluency, or the impairment or deviant development of language comprehension and/or expression, or the impairment of the use of a spoken or other symbol system that adversely affects educational performance. The language impairment may be manifested by one or more of the following components of language: morphology, syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics.	Communication disorders are problems with speaking, understanding, or using language that affect school performance. This can include issues with how words are formed, sentence structure, word meanings, sounds, and social language use.

[20] Oregon Administrative Law 581-015-2000 https://oregon.public.law/rules/oar_581-015-2000

Disability category	Official definition[20]	Common language definition
Deaf-Blindness	Having both hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational problems that the child cannot be accommodated in special education programs designed solely for students having hearing or visual impairments.	Deaf-blindness means having both hearing and vision problems that are so severe that the child cannot be helped in special education programs designed only for hearing or vision problems.
Developmental Delay	1.5 standard deviations or more below the mean in two or more of the following developmental areas for early childhood special education and school-aged special education (ages 3–9), that adversely affects a child's developmental progress when the child is age 3 to kindergarten and the student's educational performance when the student is kindergarten through age 9: • Cognitive development • Physical development • Communication development • Social or emotional development • Adaptive development	Developmental delay means being significantly below average in two or more areas, such as thinking skills, physical skills, communication skills, social or emotional skills, and self-help skills, and these delays affect school performance.
Emotional Disturbance	A condition showing 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. Note: The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.	Emotional disturbance means having one or more of the following traits over a long time and to a strong degree that affects school performance: trouble learning that can't be explained by other factors, trouble making or keeping relationships, inappropriate behavior or feelings, unhappiness or depression, physical symptoms or fears related to personal or school problems. This term includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are just socially maladjusted unless they also have an emotional disturbance.

Disability category	Official definition[20]	Common language definition
Hearing Impairment	A hearing condition, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes those children who are hard of hearing or deaf.	Hearing impairment means having a hearing problem, whether permanent or changing, that affects school performance. This includes children who are hard of hearing or deaf.
Intellectual Disability	Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently [at the same time] with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.	Intellectual disability means having significantly below-average thinking skills along with problems in self-help skills, showing up during the developmental period, that affect school performance.
Orthopedic Impairment	A motor disability that adversely affects the child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by an anomaly, disease or other conditions (e.g., cerebral palsy, spinal bifida, muscular dystrophy or traumatic injury).	Orthopedic impairment means having a physical disability that affects school performance. This includes problems caused by an irregularity, disease, or other conditions like cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, or injury.
Other Health Impairment	Having 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 child's educational performance.	Other health impairment means having limited strength, energy, or alertness, including being overly alert to things around them, that affects school performance. This is due to chronic or acute health problems like asthma, ADHD, diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, kidney problems, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome.

Disability category	Official definition[20]	Common language definition
Specific Learning Disability	A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disability; of emotional disturbance; or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.	Specific learning disability means having trouble with one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written. This shows up as trouble listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing math. This includes conditions like perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. It does not include learning problems mainly caused by visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.
Traumatic Brain Injury	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. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.	Traumatic brain injury means having an injury to the brain caused by an outside physical force, resulting in total or partial disability or social problems, or both, that affects school performance. This includes open or closed head injuries causing problems in areas like thinking, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem-solving, sensory, perceptual, and motor skills, social behavior, physical functions, information processing, and speech. It does not include brain injuries that are congenital, degenerative, or caused by birth trauma.
Visual Impairment Including Blindness	An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term visual impairment includes low vision, total blindness, limited visual acuity after correction, restricted visual field, and progressive eye conditions.	Visual impairment means having a vision problem that, even with correction, affects school performance. This includes low vision, total blindness, limited vision after correction, restricted visual field, and progressive eye conditions.

Appendix C.
Resources to Support Families

Native American advocacy organizations

Native American Disability Law Center

Farmington, New Mexico Office
905 W. Apache Street
Farmington, New Mexico 87401
Phone: 800-862-7271 or 505-566-5880

Flagstaff, Arizona Office
1515 E. Cedar Ave., Suite D1
Flagstaff, Arizona 86004
Phone: 800-862-7271 or 928-433-0963
Website: https://www.nativedisabilitylaw.org/contact-us

Center for Parent Information and Resources

Each state has dedicated parent centers to support parents and family members of students with disabilities. The national center serves as the primary information hub.

National Center

c/o Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)
570 Broad Street, Suite 702
Newark, NJ 07102
Website: https://www.parentcenterhub.org/whatiscpir/
Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. Eastern Time
Telephone: 973-642-8100
For questions, please email: CPIR@spanadvocacy.org

Native American Resource Collection

Website: https://www.parentcenterhub.org/welcome-to-the-naptac-library/#naptac-story

Oregon-specific parent centers

CODSN Central Oregon Disability Support Network

2525 NE Twin Knolls Drive #7

Bend, OR 97701

Phone: 541-548-8559

Email: info@codsn.org

Website: https://www.codsn.org/homepage-backup/

Family and Community Together (FACT) Oregon

2475 SE Ladd Avenue, Suite 430

Portland, OR 97214

Phone: 888-988-3228 or 503-786-6082

Email: support@factoregon.org

Website: https://www.factoregon.org/

Disability rights advocates

Disability Rights Oregon

511 SW 10th Avenue, Suite 200

Portland, OR 97205

Phone: 503-243-2081 or 800-452-1694, M–F 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. or 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Website: https://www.droregon.org/request-help

Oregon Department of Education American Indian/ Alaska Native Education

Website: https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Pages/default.aspx

Student and Parent Resources: https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Pages/Indian-Education-Resources.aspx

Appendix D.
What To Look for in an Evaluation Report

At the conclusion of your student's special education referral process, the psychologist will write a report to present the results. This is often called an evaluation report. Typically, you will not see the actual questions and answers on the tests that were given or even the raw scores (that is, how many questions your child answered correctly). Instead, you will get a report that describes the tests given and the scores calculated based on the raw scores. A good report should contain all or most of the following sections:[21]

- **Identifying information.** This section should include your child's age and/or date of birth, as well as the date of the evaluation.
- **Reason for referral.** This section should explain why the referral was made and should summarize any concerns raised by teachers or parents.
- **Assessment procedures:** This section should list all the sources of information used by the evaluator to reach their conclusions.
- **Background information/interview findings.** A thorough evaluation should include an interview with the parents, revealing background information, health history, and educational history. Private evaluators usually include this section, but many school evaluations do not, as the evaluator may not contact the parents.
- **Previous testing.** If there are any previous tests or earlier psychoeducational evaluations, the evaluator should review them.
- **Behavioral observations.** The evaluator should note what they observed about your child, including how your child interacted with them and approached the testing situation and any other factors that might provide insight into the test results. They should also include a statement about whether the test results are considered reliable and valid.
- **Evaluation results.** This section should list the various tests given and explain what each test was measuring. Since most tests have various subtests, those should also be explained. The report should contain an explanation of the scores and their meaning, along with charts showing the actual scores.
- **Summary of findings.** The report should summarize and analyze the findings from the evaluation. Private evaluators typically provide a diagnosis and specific recommendations, while school psychologists usually leave the decision about a student's special education eligibility up to the IEP team.

[21] Adapted from: Wettach, J. R. (2017). *A parent's guide to special education in North Carolina.* Children's Law Clinic, Duke Law School.

- **Recommendations.** This section should offer suggestions about what your child needs to succeed in the educational setting and should be directed to both teachers and parents.

Suggested questions to ask about an evaluation report

An evaluation report can be very overwhelming for parents. You should be given time to read and understand the report before making decisions based on it (such as whether your child needs special education). You should also be given the chance to speak with the psychologist about the report. Here are some questions you might want to ask about a report:

- What were my child's areas of strength?
- What were the biggest problem areas for my child?
- What types of problems/questions was my child not able to complete correctly?
- Do the tests show any patterns of strengths and weaknesses when looked at as a whole?
- What do the tests show about how my child learns best?
- What is getting in the way of my child's success in the classroom?
- What types of modifications in school will help my child?
- How should my child's lessons be specialized to meet their needs?
- What can I and my child's teachers do to help my child work around their problem areas?
- What can I and my child's teachers do to help my child develop strengths where there are now weaknesses?
- What does [specific term or conclusion] mean? (Ask them to clarify any term or conclusion that does not make sense to you.)

Appendix E. Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

PLAAFP elements	Description	Guiding questions
Student needs	Information on the student's current academic and/or functional needs	What are: • The student's strengths? • The main areas of concern (academic, functional) and how do these concerns relate to district or state standards and benchmarks and the student's postsecondary interests? • The parents' concerns? • The student's instructional preferences? • The results from the evaluation (standardized tests and other data to monitor the student's progress)? • Ways in which the student's strengths can help address the identified areas of concern?
Effect on progress in general education	An explanation of how the disability affects the student's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum	How does the student's disability affect their: • Involvement in general education? • Access to the general education curriculum? • Progress in the general education curriculum?
Baseline information	Baseline data, such as test scores, used as a starting point from which a student's future progress can be measured	Are the data being reviewed to determine whether the student is making progress: • Specific? • Objective? • Measurable? • Something that can be collected frequently? And do these data relate to: • Identified areas of concern? • State content standards?

PLAAFP elements	Description	Guiding questions
Connection to goals and/or services	Bridge between the PLAAFP statement and an annual goal	Is there enough information in the PLAAFP to develop a challenging, ambitious, measurable annual goal? Is there enough information in the PLAAFP to determine what special education, related services, accommodations, and program modifications are needed? *Note: These are simple "yes" or "no" questions.*

Source: The IRIS Center. (2018). *IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs.* https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/

Example PLAAFP

PLAAFP Element	Example Text
Student Needs	K is a 9-year-old, grade 4 student who is eligible for special education services under the category of Specific Learning Disability. K has strong expressive and receptive language skills and a large vocabulary. As a result, he actively engages in class discussions and performs well on tasks that require auditory comprehension (for example, following multi-step directions, answering comprehension questions about class discussions or about passages that are read to him). His strong communication skills have also earned him the friendship and respect of his peers, many of whom look to K as a class leader. K's learning disability negatively affects his decoding skills, which are at a low grade 2 level. His broad reading scores on standardized tests are: **Grade equivalent score: 2.2 National percentile rank: 27** In addition to school-based concerns, K's parents worry about the effects of his learning disability outside of school. For example, K avoids games that involve even a little bit of reading, resulting in some conflicts during weekly family game nights, which often involve board games. When the family eats out, K prefers one restaurant whose menu he has memorized and protests if a new restaurant is selected due to anxiety about reading an unfamiliar menu.
Effect on Progress in General Education	The grade 4 curriculum involves many independent reading activities. K's decoding problems affect his performance in the general education setting because he cannot independently read items like written instructions, worksheets, or content area texts. He is self-conscious about his reading difficulties and works hard to hide his reading struggles from his classmates. As a result, he is unwilling to use text-to-speech technologies on his tablet, even with headphones, or partner with a peer reader.

PLAAFP Element	Example Text
Baseline Information	K is currently reading 54 words correct per minute (wpm) on a grade 2 reading test, which is slightly higher than the grade 2 fall benchmark of 50 wpm. The grade 4 fall benchmark is 95 wpm on a reading test.
Connection to Goals and/ or Services	Yes, there is enough information to determine annual goals and/or services and supports.

Source: The IRIS Center. (2018). *IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs.* https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/

Appendix F.
What To Look for in IEP Goals

Goal elements	What the element describes	What should be included	What should not be included
Target behavior The academic or functional skill to be changed	What skill does the student need to demonstrate?	Active terminology describing the target behavior. *Examples:* • Read aloud • Calculate mathematics problems • Initiate a positive peer-to-peer interaction	Vague or passive terms that can be open to interpretation. *Examples:* • Enjoy reading • Understand math problems • Make friends • Build self-esteem • Develop vocational skills
Condition The context or environment in which the target behavior is to be exhibited and measured; may reference the measurement tool	In what context does the student need to demonstrate that skill?	Clear, specific language describing the condition under which the target behavior will be performed. *Examples:* • Given a third-grade level reading passage ... • When given a sheet of 20 double-digit multiplication problems ... • During the 20-minute morning recess ...	Overly broad language or omit the condition entirely. *Examples:* • During reading ... • For math ... • No condition is listed

Goal elements	What the element describes	What should be included	What should not be included
Criterion for acceptable performance The level of performance at which the IEP team members can determine that a student has achieved the goal	How will we know the student has achieved the goal?	Specific, measurable, and realistic—but challenging—performance criteria. *Examples:* • At a rate of 95 words correct per minute (wpm) • With at least 85 percent accuracy on three consecutive weekly progress monitoring probes • At least once per recess, three out of five days, for four consecutive weeks, as deemed appropriate using a three-point rubric	Performance criteria that reflect subjective opinions. *Examples:* • At an increased rate • Scores will improve over time • Determined by teacher observation • When he feels like it
Timeframe The period within which the student can be expected to meet the performance criteria	When can the student be expected to achieve the goal?	Establish a specific and realistic timeframe. *Examples:* • By the end of the school year • By the end of the first nine-week grading period • By the end of October	No timeframe provided or an unrealistic timeframe (for example, too long, too short).

Source: The IRIS Center. (2018). *IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs.* https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/

Appendix G. Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) and Supplementary Aids and Services

Service	Explanation	Example
SDI/Special Education	• Specially designed instruction that meets the unique needs of a student with a disability in the areas of academics, functional and behavioral skills, and/or secondary transition • More intensive and individualized instruction than is typically provided in the general education classroom • Provided by an education professional with expertise in individualizing and intensifying instruction, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making	Eli receives instruction in specialized skills, including individual lessons focused on the foundational reading skills of individual letter sounds and blending of sounds into words. This instruction is provided by the special education teacher each day for 20 minutes. Eli receives instruction on how to use text-to-speech software, and when it is appropriate for him to use it. This instruction is provided once a week for 15 minutes by the special education teacher.
Related Services	• Supportive services necessary for that student to benefit from special education services • Can include transportation, psychological services, speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, social work services, and school health services • Not allowable: services delivered by a medical doctor or those related to insertion, optimization, or maintenance or replacement of surgically implanted medical devices (for example, a cochlear implant) • Usually provided one or more times per week for short periods of time (for example, two sessions per week, 30 minutes each) • The student can receive more than one related service, based on their individual needs	Eli receives speech language therapy twice a week for 30 minutes. These sessions are focused on improving his mild stutter. These services are provided by the school district's speech language pathologists.

Service	Explanation	Example
Supplementary Aids and Services	Accommodations or modifications that allow the student to access both education-related and nonacademic school-related activities Can also include: • Other types of direct services and supports to the student (for example, health care assistant for a student with significant health needs) • Support and training for relevant school staff (for example, collaborative planning time for teachers)	Eli receives numerous accommodations to help him succeed in his general education classes. Some of those include: • Extended time on tests, because Eli often takes longer to read text than his peers • Verbal instructions for assignments • Preferential seating in the classroom to ensure Eli is close to the teacher • For assignments not assessing reading skills, Eli can have text read to him • Teachers modify some reading assignments for Eli, such as reducing the amount of text he's asked to read or giving him a revised set of comprehension questions
Program Modifications and Supports for School Personnel	• Supports provided to school personnel to assist them in helping a student achieve his or her annual goals and to be involved in the general education classroom • Can include training on special equipment, adaptations to the general education classroom, or specialized training for the general education teacher	Eli's teachers receive training on how to use text-to-speech software that can read text to Eli when appropriate.

Source: The IRIS Center. (2018). *IEPs: Developing high-quality individualized education programs.* https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/