



# COMPREHENSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATION

## Framework Overview

### Overview

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that special education evaluations be sufficiently comprehensive to make eligibility decisions and identify the student's educational needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the student has been classified (34 CFR 300.304). Comprehensive evaluations are conducted in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner; non-discriminatory for students of all cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other backgrounds. When conducting special education evaluations, IEP teams must follow all procedural and substantive evaluation requirements specified in IDEA and Wisconsin Statute Chapter 115. See [Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation-Related Legal Citations](#) for a summary of the legal requirements for conducting comprehensive special education evaluations and [Information Update Bulletin 21.01- Special Education Evaluation](#) for additional related guidance. For more information about conducting culturally responsive special education evaluations and addressing systemic and racial referral and evaluation bias within an equitable MLSS see the [Addressing Bias in a Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation section of this framework](#).

The purpose of the Wisconsin Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation Framework is to share a renewed focus on evaluation as a process of collecting and analyzing information about the whole student, with the ultimate goal of understanding the student's unique educational needs. The following key points summarize the core concepts and features of the framework:

### Key Points

- Special education evaluations must be sufficiently comprehensive for IEP teams to determine special education eligibility or continuing eligibility, and to identify the educational needs of the student, whether or not commonly linked to the student's identified disability category(ies).
- Comprehensive evaluation is a process, not an event. IEP team participants work together to explore, problem-solve, and make decisions about eligibility for special education services. If found eligible, the IEP team uses information gathered during the evaluation to collectively develop the content of the student's IEP.

- A comprehensive special education evaluation actively engages the family throughout the evaluation process.
- Comprehensive evaluations are first and foremost “needs focused” on identifying academic and functional skill areas affected by the student’s disability, rather than “label focused” on identifying a disability category label which may, or may not, accurately infer student need.
- [Developmentally and educationally relevant questions](#) about instruction, curriculum, environment, as well as the student (learner) ([see Intervention Central’s RIOT/ICEL Matrix](#)), guide the evaluation. Such questions are especially helpful during the review of existing data to determine what, if any, additional information is needed. Asking clarifying questions throughout the evaluation helps the team explore educational concerns as well as student strengths and needs such as barriers to and conditions that support student learning, and important skills the student needs to develop or improve.
- Culturally responsive problem-solving and data-based decision-making using current, valid, and reliable (i.e. accurate) assessment data and information is critical to conducting a comprehensive evaluation.
- Assessment tools and strategies used to collect additional information must be linguistically and culturally sensitive and must provide accurate and useful data about the student’s academic, developmental, and functional skills.
- Data and other information used during the evaluation process is collected through multiple means including review, interview, observation, and testing; as well as across domains of learning including instruction, curriculum, environment, and learner ([RIOT-ICEL Framework](#)).
- Individuals who collect and interpret assessment data and other information during an evaluation must be appropriately skilled in test administration and other data collection methods. This includes understanding of how systemic, racial, and other types of bias may influence data collection and interpretation, and how individual student characteristics may influence results.
- Assessment data and other information gathered over time and across environments helps the IEP team understand and make evaluation decisions about the nature and effects of a student’s disability on their education.
- Comprehensive evaluations must provide information relevant to making decisions about how to educate the student. A comprehensive evaluation provides the foundation for developing an IEP that promotes student access, engagement, and progress in age or grade level general education curriculum, instruction and other activities, and environments.

# Table of Contents

Overview ..... 1

Key Points..... 1

About the Framework..... 4

Planning and Conducting a Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation ..... 5

Start the Evaluation..... 6

Plan the Evaluation..... 7

Implement the Evaluation Plan..... 9

Complete the Evaluation ..... 10

## About the Framework

Comprehensive evaluations must provide information relevant to making decisions about how to educate the student so they can access, engage, and make meaningful progress toward meeting age and grade level standards. Assessment and collection of additional information plays a central role during the evaluation and subsequently in IEP development and reviewing student progress. The Framework for Comprehensive Evaluation provides an organizing structure with which to plan and conduct special education evaluations with these ends in mind.

The framework was developed in response to feedback from participants and other stakeholders following statewide and regional training and sharing of resources on College and Career Ready (CCR) IEPs. The feedback revealed a growing awareness of the relationship between evaluation and IEP development and the need for information about how special education evaluations and reevaluations can be made more useful for IEP development. The [2017 US Supreme Court Endrew F. case](#) also brought renewed attention to the importance of knowing whether a student's IEP is sufficient to enable a student with a disability to make progress “appropriate in light of their circumstances.” Finally, enduring challenges supported the need for updated guidance, including results of statewide procedural compliance self-assessment, IDEA complaints addressing whether evaluations are sufficiently comprehensive, and continuing disproportionate disability identification, placement, and discipline in student groups who traditionally are not equitably served.

The Framework responds to stakeholders' requests for more information and reinforces the department's vision that every public school student graduates ready for further education, the workplace, and the community. It also supports the department's special education team's mission to improve outcomes and ensure a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for every student protected under IDEA. The framework builds on years of collective experience, research, and evolving legislation and case law. It was developed to help guide IEP teams in planning and conducting special education evaluations that explicitly address state and federal requirements to conduct comprehensive evaluations that help IEP teams to determine eligibility, and thoroughly and clearly identify student needs. In this way, the Framework for Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation directly supports the development of College and Career Ready (CCR) IEPs, regardless of the student's identified category of disability.

This document is the first of a number of resources on Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation. It focuses on the process and steps for planning and conducting a comprehensive special education evaluation. The information in all resources on this topic is intended to apply to every Wisconsin local education agency (LEA), including public school districts and 2R and 2X charter schools. Throughout the documents, the more common term “district” is used, and is intended to mean all Wisconsin LEAs. Additional professional learning and technical assistance resources to support implementation is available on the department's website and will continue to be expanded.

## Planning and Conducting a Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the key to addressing a student's disability-related needs. It describes annual goals and the supports and services a student must receive so they can access, engage, and make progress in general education. A well developed IEP is the vehicle to ensure that a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is provided to students protected under IDEA. A comprehensive special education evaluation provides the foundation for effective IEP development. Furthermore, [comprehensive special education evaluation exists within the context of a local education agency's integrated equitable multi-level system of social and emotional, behavioral, and academic supports \(MLSS\)](#).

A comprehensive special education evaluation is conducted by a student's IEP team appointed by the district. The IEP team must include the parent as a required participant and essential partner in decision-making. Special Education evaluation is a collaborative IEP team responsibility. Furthermore, evaluation represents a process, not an event. During the evaluation process, the team collectively gathers relevant information, and uses it to make accurate and individualized decisions about a student's eligibility or continuing eligibility, effects of disability, areas of strength, and academic and functional needs. Data and other information used to make evaluation decisions come from a variety of sources and environments, often extending beyond the IEP team. Guided by developmentally and educationally relevant questions, both existing and new information is compiled or collected, analyzed, integrated, and summarized by the IEP team to provide a comprehensive picture of the student's educational strengths and needs.

A comprehensive special education evaluation is grounded in a culturally responsive problem-solving model in which potential systemic, racial, and other bias is addressed, and hypotheses about the nature and extent of the student's disability are generated and explored. Because assessments must be selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis, IEP team participants must collectively be skilled in test administration and other data collection methods, and must also understand how systemic, racial, and other types of bias may influence the special education evaluation process and subsequent decisions. Finally, there is an assumption that culturally responsive problem-solving is used at all levels of the district's MLSS. This means that within general education instruction and intervention, as individual student needs arise, educational teams reflect on the instruction, curriculum, and educational environment factors to consider bias or inequities in the system before considering individual learning needs and making a referral for a special education evaluation. For more information about conducting culturally responsive special education evaluations and addressing systemic and racial bias see the [Addressing Bias in a Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation](#) section of this framework.

Conducting a comprehensive special education evaluation requires planning. The following chart provides an overview of the department's recommended process for planning and conducting comprehensive special education evaluations.

## Planning and Conducting Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation: Process Chart

IEP teams follow these steps when conducting comprehensive special education evaluations. The Evaluation Process Chart outlines required IDEA timeline procedures and describes recommended actions for each step. Links to related forms and other resources are included.

- Start the Evaluation
- Plan the Evaluation
- Implement the Evaluation Plan
- Complete the Evaluation

Also see [Information Update Bulletin 21.01- Special Education Evaluation](#) for answers to specific questions about special education evaluation timeline procedures, and other requirements and processes.

### Start the Evaluation

<b>Procedures</b> (and related <a href="#">Sample IEP forms</a> )	<b>Actions</b>
Referral or request for reevaluation (Sample form <a href="#">R-1</a> , or <a href="#">RE-1</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Evaluation: A special education referral starts the initial special education evaluation process. The referral describes why the person making the referral believes the student is a “child with a disability” who needs special education.</li> <li>• Reevaluation: A reevaluation is started when the LEA decides a student’s disability-related needs, including improved academic achievement and functional performance, warrant a reevaluation; or if the student’s parent or teacher requests a reevaluation. A reevaluation occurs at least once every 3 years unless the parent and LEA agree it is unnecessary.</li> </ul>
Notice of start of evaluation or reevaluation and appointment of IEP team (Sample forms <a href="#">IE-1</a> , <a href="#">RE-1</a> , <a href="#">RE-2</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select IEP team participants with collective expertise about areas of student strength and need, age and grade level standards and expectations, disability category criteria, and state and federal evaluation process requirements.</li> <li>• Identify if any specialists (from LEA or outside LEA) may be needed on the team to provide expertise about concerns representing particular areas of need such as specific medical or health concerns or a low incidence condition requiring specific expertise such as blind and visually impaired, deafblind, and deaf and hard of hearing.</li> <li>• Ensure someone on the team has expertise in coordination and facilitation.</li> </ul>

# Plan the Evaluation

<p><b>Procedures</b> (and related <a href="#">Sample IEP forms</a>)</p>	<p><b>Actions</b></p>
<p>Review of Existing Data and determine if additional assessment needed</p> <p>(Sample Form <a href="#">ED-1</a> and appropriate I-1 forms when a meeting is held to review data and made decisions about additional assessment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate student specific developmentally and educationally relevant questions using the <a href="#">Six Areas of Academic and Functional Skill</a> as a guide to explore all areas of suspected concern related to the referral or request for reevaluation. The Six Areas include: academic, cognitive learning, communication, independence and self-determination, social and emotional, physical and health.</li> <li>• Clarify and explore all areas of suspected concern with the person(s) who made the referral or requested the reevaluation as well as related concerns of those who interact with the student in and out of school by asking developmentally and educationally relevant questions.</li> <li>• Use a variety of engagement modes to actively engage the family and student (as appropriate) in the review of existing data and identifying what additional information is needed.</li> <li>• Identify <u>existing</u> functional, developmental, and academic information about student access, engagement and progress in general education curriculum, instruction and other school activities, and environments.</li> <li>• Review and refine developmentally and educationally relevant questions as needed to ensure nothing will be missed.</li> <li>• Consider potential disability categories that should be considered so sufficient information will be available to apply initial or reevaluation disability category criteria. Make sure the IEP team includes individuals with expertise in the category(ies) of disability that may be considered.</li> <li>• Decide what, if any, additional data or other assessment information is needed to explore all areas of suspected academic and functional skill concern, areas of student strengths and assets, and to apply anticipated disability category criteria.</li> <li>• Use a problem-solving framework (e.g., <a href="#">RIOT/ICEL</a>) to guide review of existing data and maintain focus on the whole student. Consider information about instruction, curriculum, learning environments, and the student.</li> <li>• Review the evaluation plan with a culturally responsive problem-solving lens to address potential systemic, racial, testing, and other types of bias that may affect compiling, collecting, or interpreting assessment results to ensure a comprehensive, non-discriminatory evaluation is completed, as required by IDEA.</li> </ul>

## Plan the Evaluation (continued)

<b>Procedures</b> (and related <a href="#">Sample IEP forms</a> )	<b>Actions</b>
Notice and Consent- Need to Conduct Additional Assessment (Forms <a href="#">IE-2</a> , <a href="#">IE-3</a> , <a href="#">RE-4</a> , <a href="#">RE-5</a> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before moving forward, ensure data and information that will be used to make evaluation decisions comes from multiple sources and is collected using a variety of assessment tools and methods such as record reviews, observations, interviews, dynamic assessments, curriculum-based evaluation, and norm-referenced standardized tests; and includes information gathered in the student’s natural learning environments. See Categories and Types of Assessment for more information.</li> <li>• Document review of existing data and decision about additional assessment or other information needed.</li> <li>• Communicate with the family and others to clearly explain who will administer assessments and collect other information, the types of assessments that will be implemented and the tools used to collect other information and clarify any questions that family members or others may have.</li> <li>• If additional information is needed, request written consent from parent/guardian to collect information.</li> </ul>



# Implement the Evaluation Plan

Procedures (and related <a href="#">Sample IEP forms</a> )	Actions
<p>Collect additional data and information as needed (per notice and consent)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure those administering assessments have appropriate training and qualifications as required by the type or method of assessment. This includes training in culturally responsive assessment strategies needed to recognize and identify potential systemic, racial, testing, and other types of bias that may affect reliability and validity of assessment results.</li> <li>• Ensure those who administer assessments and collect additional information are appropriately trained and prepared to analyze, share, summarize, and explain the data and their findings in a manner understandable to all IEP team participants.</li> <li>• Select and administer assessments and collect additional information using culturally responsive assessment techniques to obtain valid and reliable information about current academic and functional performance and the effects of such performance on student access, engagement and progress in general education curriculum, instruction, environments, and other school activities (e.g., extracurricular activities, school sponsored social events, community based vocational training, etc.). The norm group for norm-referenced tests should include representation of the student being evaluated.</li> <li>• Follow non-discriminatory assessment and data collection requirements and other culturally responsive practices to ensure evaluation decisions are accurate and as free of bias as possible.</li> <li>• Assign someone to revisit the evaluation plan to ensure all developmentally and educationally relevant questions are being addressed and evaluation timelines will be met. Amend Notice and Consent if necessary.</li> <li>• Maintain communication with the parent.</li> <li>• Those who administered assessments or collected or compiled other information should be prepared to answer any questions team participants may have about the tools or methods used to collect information, the findings, and possible implications for answering developmentally and educationally relevant questions.</li> </ul>

# Complete the Evaluation

Procedures (and related <a href="#">Sample IEP forms</a> )	Actions
<p>IEP Team Evaluation Meeting and Eligibility Determination</p> <p>(Sample Forms I-1: <a href="#">I-1-A</a>, <a href="#">I-1-B</a>, <a href="#">I-1-C</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the meeting, identify a qualified individual to be the meeting facilitator. The facilitator should prepare for and coordinate the IEP team evaluation meeting to ensure all IEP team participants, including the parent, collectively participate in reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting assessment information and make required evaluation decisions: special education eligibility or continuing eligibility and identifying the educational needs of the student.</li> <li>• The IEP team reviews the developmentally and educationally relevant questions (from the evaluation plan) in relation to findings from existing and new assessments and other information gathered in prior steps.</li> <li>• Consider all information and make evaluation decisions:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For students who are culturally or linguistically diverse, how are the assessment results indicative of a disability versus a difference?</li> <li>○ Do any exclusionary factors apply?</li> <li>○ Does the student meet or continue to meet disability category criteria (refer to disability category forms)?</li> <li>○ What are the effects of disability (e.g., how does the student’s disability affect access, engagement, and progress in age or grade-level general education curriculum, instruction, environments, or activities; under what conditions are these effects intensified or lessened)?</li> <li>○ What are the student’s disability-related needs, whether or not commonly linked to the student’s identified category(ies) of disability (e.g., areas in which the student needs to develop or improve skills that address effects of the student’s disability so the student can access, engage and make progress in general education)?</li> <li>○ Does the student need or continue to need specially designed instruction to address disability-related needs? Or can the student’s educational needs be addressed without specially designed instruction?</li> <li>○ If the student is eligible for special education, ensure there is enough information to include in the evaluation report to support the IEP team’s eligibility decision and information about the student’s educational needs that can be used to develop or review and revise the student’s IEP. Evaluation information should help the team develop an IEP that supports access, engagement and progress to meet age and grade-level general education standards and expectations (i.e. consider <a href="#">CCR IEP development guidelines</a>).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• If the student is not, or is no longer, eligible for special education, ensure there is enough information to support the IEP team eligibility decision and to make recommendations about student needs that can be addressed with general education supports to help the student access, engage, and make progress in age or grade-level general education. The team may consider if the student is eligible for protection under section 504 because of a “physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities.” (Note: the definition and disability criteria under section 504 are different from those under IDEA and Ch. 115 WI Stats.).</li> </ul>

## Complete the Evaluation (continued)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Procedures</b> (and related <a href="#">Sample IEP forms</a>)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Actions</b></p>
<p>Evaluation Report Including Notice of Eligibility Decision Report Provided to Parent  (Forms <a href="#">ER-1</a>, <a href="#">ER-2-A</a>, <a href="#">ER-2-B</a>, <a href="#">ER-3</a>, <a href="#">ER-4</a>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document the IEP team evaluation decisions about eligibility and educational need on the evaluation report, including all required forms.</li> <li>• Communicate and clarify next steps and any questions with the IEP team, including the parent (e.g., timelines for IEP development, plans to address student needs if student is not or no longer eligible for special education under IDEA).</li> <li>• If the student is eligible or continues to be eligible for special education: review and revise (as appropriate) the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP).</li> <li>• If the student is found not, or no longer eligible for special education, make general education recommendations as appropriate, such as supports other than special education services, within the LEA’s equitable multi-level system of support (MLSS).</li> <li>• If the student is found not, or no longer eligible for special education, information collected during the special education evaluation may be used to consider eligibility for protection under section 504 because of a “physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities.” The means of documenting eligibility under section 504 is left up to districts. If found eligible under section 504, the district must address individual needs such as providing general education accommodations or other supports within the district’s equitable multilevel system of support (<a href="#">MLSS</a>).</li> </ul>



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