



A Parent's Guide
to
Special Education

Wilkes Elementary School



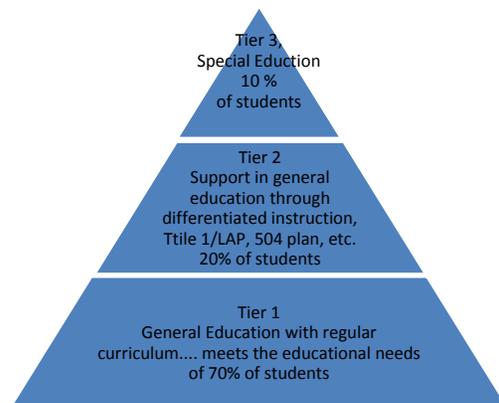
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Introduction

This hand book is designed to give Parents an overview of Special Education referral and evaluation and to provide you with information that you may need to navigate the special education process.

An important consideration before special education referral is the implementation of interventions and strategies within general education.

The administration and staff at Wilkes Elementary School are committed to providing an appropriate education for all children with disabilities in accordance with **Public Law 105-17** and **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA)**. One of the requirements in IDEA, is for schools to implement and document ***Response to Intervention (RTI)***, prior to pursuing a special education referral. In other words, “Has the school done all it can within general education resources before suggesting a special education evaluation?”



Education for all students in public education can be viewed as a three Tier process and ***Response to Intervention*** reflects this philosophy. Tier 1 can be envisioned as the bottom 70% of a triangle; encompassing most students who receive their education within the general education classroom with the curriculum adopted by the district in line with state and federal core standards and essential learning requirements.

The next 20 % of the triangle or Tier 2 includes students who, for one reason or another, need some additional support. Tier 2 support includes the strategies a teacher might use to help his/her student access the curriculum such as; differentiating the instruction, providing some small group instruction, extra practice time, reducing expectations, using a volunteer to provide extra help etc. Additionally, some students may access Tier 2 intervention through Title 1/LAP

programs, which serves students in Reading and Math who have the lowest scores within a school distribution and who are below a determined cut-off point. Tier 2 intervention may also include a behavior plan established by the teacher, parent and principal, a short term social skills group or 1:1 time with the school counselor. These are all possible examples of Tier 2 interventions implemented by the general education staff.

A 504 Plan is another Tier 2 intervention, which establishes a plan for students with an identified disability for whom accommodations within the general education program is sufficient to access the curriculum and for learning. Students with a 504 plan do not require specially designed instruction.

The top 10% of the RTI triangle is for those students for whom Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions have not shown to be sufficient to access the standard curriculum within the general education environment. Students in this top 10% receive Special Education Services.

How does the Process Begin?

Step 1: Identify Concerns and Complete the Student Study Team (SST) form

The process begins with a teacher or parent concern. Any individual, i.e., teacher parent, or staff with a concern about a child's learning or performance can bring that concern to the Student Study Team. It is the classroom teacher's responsibility to discuss this concern with you and to complete the SST form. Your child's teacher may bring his/her concerns to your attention, If a) your child has not responded to interventions within the general education environment and/or b) the teachers and parents are seeking strategies within Tier 2 or c) want to discuss referral for Tier 3.

Step 2; Student Study Team Meeting

The completed SST form is submitted to the school counselor who schedules a meeting with the Student Study Team. The Student Study Team is chaired by the school counselor, who is your initial contact person in the referral process. Other members of the student study team include you (parent or guardian), special education teacher, the special education evaluation team (school psychologist, speech and language therapist and the occupational therapist), classroom teacher, Title 1/LAP teacher (if student has been receiving these services) and frequently but not always the principal.

The goal of the Student Study Team is to review concerns, look at work samples, and discuss current intervention strategies and their effectiveness and to brainstorm ideas and strategies. By the end of the meeting generally a clear direction emerges....Sometimes the result is to take more time to try some different approaches. Many parents on Bainbridge Island may decide they would like to contract and pay for private tutoring before progressing further with school district options. This is, of course, a parental choice that is outside the purview of public education. Or perhaps this is one of the interventions that have you have already tried with limited results. Sometimes the direction moves toward implementing accommodations or an informal observation or screening.

Often the outcome is a general consensus that Tier 2 interventions have been sufficiently tried and the conversation moves toward possible evaluation.

Step 3: Is an Evaluation Recommended?

After reviewing all the information and establishing clear documentation that Tier 2 interventions have been implemented, the Student Study Team either recommends:

- “NO” Evaluation: Proceed with recommended ideas and strategies
Or
- “No” Evaluation: Insufficient Tier 2 intervention. Implement additional ideas and strategies. A date can then be set to re-convene a second SST meeting and re-visit intervention and results.
Or.....
- “YES” Evaluation,” the Tier 2 interventions have been applied and appear to be insufficient in meeting the student’s educational needs and additional information is needed through a formal evaluation. This decision moves the process to Step 4

Step 4: Initial Evaluation Team Meeting

The Student Study team determines if and what assessments are necessary. At this time, the meeting changes from a “general education meeting” to a “special education meeting”, accompanied by various forms and paperwork.

Special education evaluation and procedures cannot be implemented without your consent and a notice of our actions regarding your child. As a parent, the decision is yours as to how you want to proceed. If you agree to an evaluation,

you will be asked to sign a *Consent for Initial Evaluation* Form. This gives the special education staff your permission to proceed with formal evaluation. There is no pressure. You can sign the consent now or can take it home and think about it, read through the paperwork and talk with personal advisors. You will also be given a copy of: 1) *Notice of Action* that your child has been **referred** to the special evaluation team, 2) *Consent for Initial Evaluation*, 3) letter explaining special education services and 4) A copy of **Special Education Procedural Safeguards**, which includes assurances for confidentiality of this meeting and all special education information and documentation. Time will be taken to explain safeguards and allow you to ask questions. If you decide to sign the consent at this meeting you will also be provided another *Notice of Action* that the school is proceeding with a special education **evaluation**. Remember, an evaluation cannot proceed until you have signed and returned the consent form.

The evaluation will be completed within **35 school days** from the date the **signed consent form is received**. (School days refer to days the students are in school, so do not include weekends or holidays in which school is not in session).

Step 5: Evaluation Team Feedback Meeting

A meeting is scheduled with you to attend an evaluation team meeting. The Evaluation team, having completed their assessments, will report findings to you and your child's teacher. The team wants you to fully understand the evaluations and your child's strengths and weaknesses. Included in this packet of information you will find a "bell curve" chart, which will aid you in understanding how your child's test results compare to "average." Depending on the number of assessments administered, this process could be lengthy and at times emotional. It is a good idea to schedule them when you will not feel rushed to be somewhere else. You will be provided a draft copy of a written Evaluation Summary. A finalized copy will be provided for you after the feedback meeting to allow for possible corrections or clarification.

Following the explanation of results; The Evaluation Team asks three questions to decide if your child is eligible for special education services:

- Does the child have a disability?
- Does this disability adversely impact his/her learning?
- Does the child require specially designed instruction in order to make progress in school?

If the answer to all three of these questions is “Yes”, then special education services are recommended and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will need to be developed. The IEP meeting will be scheduled with you within ***30 calendar days***.

The scheduling of the IEP meeting and your agreement to attend is documented with either a written invitation or documentation of contact. Your attendance at the ***initial*** IEP is required in order for your child to receive special education services.

The IEP

The Individual Education Plan or IEP is developed and written by the special education staff providing services and based upon the results of the evaluation, which includes test results, parent input and classroom teacher input. The plan is specially designed for the student for whom it is written. IEP's are written on a standard district form and includes pertinent and legal information regarding special education services. It also includes student's specific educational goals in the areas for which the student has been determined to have a disability and requiring specially designed instruction.

What can I expect at an IEP meeting?

- ✧ The special education staff providing services will provide you with a draft copy of the IEP developed for your child. The general education teacher and a district representative (usually the counselor or principal) will be in attendance. You will also be offered another copy of your Procedural Safeguards and another chance to have this explained to you. (You may also access Procedural Safeguards on-line).
- ✧ The IEP form is a draft and through-out the meeting the giving and sharing of information can be incorporated so the final draft is acceptable to the parents and the team.
- ✧ You will be provided another “*Notice of Action*,” this one specifying that the District is proceeding with the IEP process and the rationale behind this decision. (I know, seems like a lot of duplication, but these are safeguards for you that the district does not proceed with special education for your child, without your knowledge)
- ✧ You will be asked to 1) Sign on the front page, that you received the Procedural Safeguards or acknowledge that you prefer to access them on

- line. 2) Sign that you have attended and participated in the IEP meeting and
3) Sign that you give consent that special education services, as defined in the IEP, can be implemented on behalf of your child.

What can I expect to find in an IEP Form?

- * Test results from the Evaluation Feedback meeting will be included in the IEP, often in an abbreviated format and as it directly relates to educational goals. These will be reviewed along with identification of any special factors (braille, special education bus...etc.)
- * Next you will review with the special education staff the **Goals** that have been written to help your child increase his learning. Goals may be stand alone or may include additional benchmarks or objectives. On the goal page you will also find a sentence or two about what the specially designed instruction may look like.... this may include specific curricula or methodology or specify small group or 1:1 instruction. Your child will have a goal page for each area in which he/she qualifies for service.
- * Following the goal pages, the IEP includes information that may or may not apply to your child regarding State and District assessment and how your child will participate in these required tests.
- * It will also include possible accommodation to ease their access to required tests as well as to the general education curriculum. *Test accommodations* may include having extended time to take tests or to do so in a quiet or alternative setting. *Classroom accommodations* may include such things as reduced output, a calculator, spell checker or visual and sensory supports.
- * The final page of the IEP, includes the amount of service your child will receive to work on the agreed upon goals. This is calculated in minutes per week. For example if your child will receive small group instruction in math for 30 minutes, 3 times per week, then the service minutes will define this as 90 minutes per week.
- * The final page will also include a calculation that defines the total minutes your child is receiving special education services and how much of this occurs outside the general education classroom.

What happens next?

The special education staff providing the services will arrange with the classroom teacher the most effective times to schedule the specially designed instruction.

Special Education staff and Classroom teachers communicate frequently about the student's progression in the curriculum, the efficacy of the schedule and continually check in regarding classroom support, accommodations and suggestions to support your child in his learning. Occasionally, para-educator support may be available in the general education classroom, specialist or at recess.

Direct service usually begin within a day or two of the signed IEP.

Special education staff appreciate active communication with you, particularly if there are events in your child's life that might impact his/her learning or if you have questions about the service and its effectiveness. Special education staff are most readily available by email and may return phone calls when they are not seeing students. Communication between home and school has been shown to have significant impact on student performance and is therefore welcomed. Face to face meetings can be scheduled when conversation is the best option.

You can expect an update on your child's progress on his/her IEP goals, at the same time you receive report cards... about 3 times a year.

The IEP is good for one year and a meeting will be scheduled with you prior to its expiration date. At the new IEP meeting, you will get a complete update on progress, current levels of performance, assessment data either formal or curriculum and new goals and objectives for the following year. The entire IEP is revised including the minutes on the final page, as to how service will be delivered in the upcoming IEP.

What about my child's grades?

The Bainbridge Island School District issues standards-based report cards for students in elementary school. Grades on these report cards are intended to indicate how a child is doing in relation to state standards in each academic area. For example, a "3" indicates that a child is expected to meet state standards in that area for his/her current grade level.

A student with an IEP has been determined to have disability that may make it difficult for him/her to meet those state standards in one or more academic areas. These students may receive modified grades for part or all of the subject areas for which their IEP indicates they need specially designed instruction. These grades appear on the report card as a number followed by a P, or an NP. The following key should be used to understand these grades:

4P = Exceeds expectations set out in IEP for this subject

3P = Making satisfactory progress on IEP goals for this subject

2P = Making little progress on IEP goals for this subject

NP = Not making satisfactory progress on IEP goals for this subject

A student with an IEP can receive modified grades **only** in **subject areas** in which they have been identified to have a disability and require that curriculum be modified, as indicated on a student's IEP. Special education students do not *have* to receive modified grading if there are sub-sections of an academic area in which they are performing at grade level. In those cases the grade is not modified, is not followed by a P, and indeed indicates how they are doing in relation to state standards.

In some instances the IEP goals do not address some specific areas on the report card within that subject/content area. For example, your student may be making progress on math goals in addition and subtraction, but because he/she has not mastered this skill is not yet working on the higher level skills of multiplication, algebra or fractions. If your student is not yet working on these areas it is designated by an PX, which indicates that this skill has not been worked on during this grading period or by an X which may indicate that the content has not yet been taught in the general education classroom

All students with IEPs who have not recently had their IEPs reviewed will also receive IEP Progress Reports with their report cards. These progress reports will indicate how they are doing on their specific IEP goals.