

# Understanding Assessments

## Part 1: The Process



# Matrix Parent Network

We **empower** families of children with special needs to successfully understand and access the systems that serve them.

We want **you** to become successful advocates and role models for your children.



# Matrix Parent Network & Resource Center

## Federal Parent Training & Information Center

designated by the *Office of Special Education, US Department of Education*

serving families of children birth through 26 in

Alpine, Amador, Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Lake, Lassen, Marin, Mendocino, Modoc, Napa,

Shasta, Sonoma, Solano, Sutter, Tehama, Yolo and Yuba counties

## California Family Resource Center

designated by *CA Department of Developmental Services,*

serving families of infants and toddlers in Marin, Sonoma and Solano

## California Family Empowerment Center

designated by *CA Department of Education*

serving the underserved in Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties

# Matrix Parent Network & Resource Center

This workshop was developed in part under a grant from the US Department of Education, the Office of Special Education and the California Department of Education.

Matrix is grateful for the Federal and State funding it receives, but it's not enough. We rely on other grants and on donations from people like you!

**Help Us Help You: Donate**

# You will leave here knowing:

- Why, how, and when, to ask for assessment
- Assessment timelines
- What elements assessments should include
- How assessments lead to Special Ed eligibility and developing an IEP
- How you can participate in the process
- What to do if you disagree



# What are Assessments?



# What are Assessments?

By definition, an assessment is:

***the evaluation or estimation of the nature, quality, or ability of someone or something.***

An assessment is the process of evaluating your child's strengths and weakness as they affect his or her ability to benefit from their education.

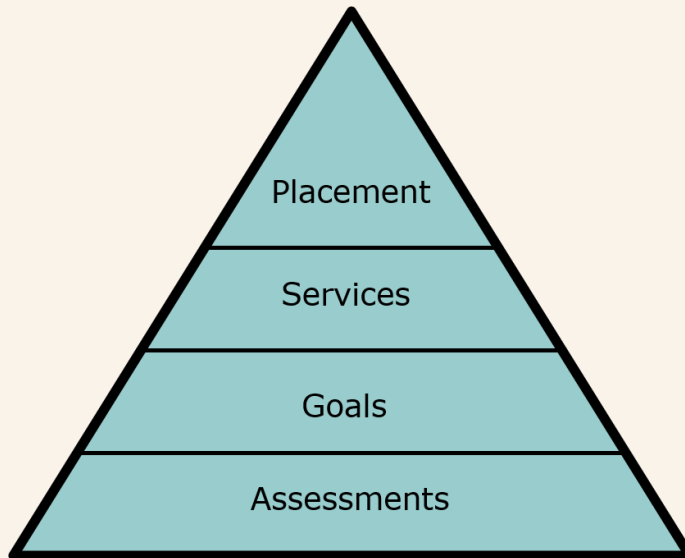


# Why get Assessments?





# Why get Assessments?



- Assessments **help** the IEP Team determine eligibility (not diagnosis) in any area of ***suspected disability***.
- Assessments are the **FOUNDATION** of an Individualized Education Program.

# Why get Assessments?

- To identify areas of need and strengths
- To track progress – parents can request assessments at any time during student's school career, not just to determine eligibility
- To develop the IEP



# How to ask for Assessments?



# How to ask for Assessments?

- Parent provides written request – check our sample letter online; school can also request assessment.
- District must respond in writing with answer in **15 calendar\*** days
- If district approves, it gives parent an Assessment Plan to sign; this form lists the areas to be assessed – but not the individual tests.



# How to ask for Assessments?

- Parent/guardian has at least **15 calendar\*** days from the receipt of the proposed assessment plan to arrive at a decision.
- You can request in writing what actual tests are going to be given to your child.
- Parent signs, and assessments begin.
- School has **60\* days** to complete assessments and develop IEP.



# How to ask for Assessments?

- If a request for assessments is denied, district must give *Prior Written Notice* which includes the reason for the denial and all the data used to deny the request.
- **This process is the same** whether it's the first time you're asking for an assessment or the 10<sup>th</sup>.
- You can (and should!) request reports prior to IEP meeting, in writing.

# When to get Assessments?





# When to get Assessments?

- Initially – first IEP
- Triennial – by law, every 3 years, if parent agrees
- To track progress once a year
- If there's a specific concern – academic, social, behavior, speech
- Transition: Student 14 years (best practice) or 16 years (by law)
- If the District wants to exit your child from Special Education



**Note:** Full assessment is NOT generally done every year. But teachers will be assessing progress on goals.

# Let's check what you've learned



# Timelines Quiz, Question #1



A parent tells a teacher that she thinks her son is struggling in school, but doesn't know why.

She wonders if the teacher can test him. The teacher says "Sure."

Nothing happens for 2 months. The parent is getting frustrated and angry. Did the parent ask for an assessment in the appropriate way?

Yes

No

# Timelines Quiz, Question #2

The school district has ten (10) days to respond to a parent's written request for an assessment.

True

False



## Timelines Quiz, Question #3

Teacher comes to you and says she would like to recommend that your child have some educational testing – a Psychoeducational Assessment and a Speech and Language Assessment. You agree.



School provides you with an Assessment Plan and you sign it. Evaluators complete assessments within 70 days from when you signed the Assessment Plan, and an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting is held in 73 days.

Is the school in compliance?      Yes                      No

# What's in Assessments?





# What is in Assessments?

Testing and evaluation should address **ALL AREAS** of suspected disability.

The acronym CHAMPS can help:

C – communication and cognitive

H – health

A – academics & adaptive skills

M – motor

P – perceptual & psychological

S – social/emotional





# What's in Assessments?

The primary report is often labeled “*Psycho-Educational Evaluation.*”

It should include:

- History/background of your student
- Statement about validity of testing
- Discussion of strengths as well as weaknesses
- Recommendations & application to education

# What's in Assessments?

**The “*Psycho-Educational Evaluation*” should include: (cont.)**

- Explanation of any tests done.
- Tests of intellectual functioning and academic skills will almost always be conducted.
- A variety of other tests may be included, based on your child's suspected area of disability.
- Scores for all tests and subtests should be included.

# What's in Assessments?

**Other reports can include:**

- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Speech and Language
- Social/Emotional

... and many others.

# What's in Assessments?

- At, or preferably before, an initial or triennial IEP, the school will provide you with one or more assessment reports.
- You can (and should!) request reports prior to IEP meeting, in writing.

# Lets discuss a couple of examples



**Wow!**



**Really?**

# Scenario 1

Your second grader enjoys being read to, but doesn't want to try to read with you.

Whenever he is asked to read aloud, he shuts down and refuses. Teacher has noticed that he is despondent at school and never raises his hand. Teacher suggests he be assessed for Special Education.

You agree and sign an assessment plan that includes academic skills and social/emotional testing.



Do you think this will be sufficient? Why or why not?

## Scenario 2

Your 6<sup>th</sup> grader has always seemed to have trouble understanding their homework assignments, but this problem has become more acute with the demands of middle school. She always seems to be cooperative in class, but never writes down the assignments in her planner, and when you help her get a copy of an assignment from a teacher, she seems not to know what to do with it. After many frustrating teacher conferences you asked that she be assessed.



The school agrees to testing for learning disabilities by doing cognitive and academic skills testing.

What other testing might you think is needed?



# Who does Assessments?



# Who does Assessments?

**Your child may be tested by any of the following professionals, depending on the areas of suspected disability:**

- School Psychologist – cognitive, social, behavioral, emotional, adaptive skills, processing
- Special Ed teacher – academic skills

# Who does Assessments?

**Your child may also be tested by any of the following professionals**

- Speech/Language – communication
- Occupational Therapist – sensory, fine motor
- Physical Therapist – gross motor

# Who does Assessments?

- **You** - through questionnaires or interviews
- Others as needed for specific areas
- Medical professionals – may be “**considered**” by the team if relevant to your child’s ability to access curriculum, but not a substitute for school’s evaluation
- Private pay professionals – school to “**consider**” results

# Assessment leads to Eligibility

- No single score determines eligibility.
- The IEP team makes an eligibility decision taking all information into consideration.
- Just having a disability doesn't mean eligibility.
- Any area of suspected disability should be evaluated.



# Assessment leads to Eligibility

An assessment does NOT diagnose disability

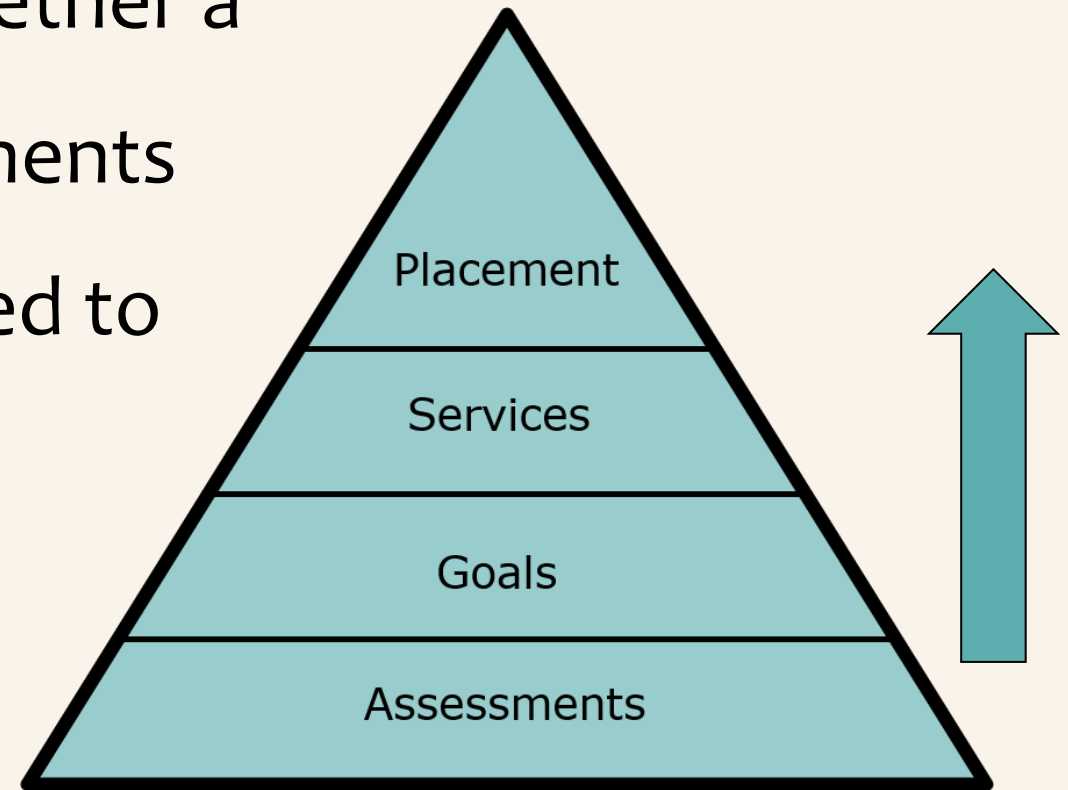
It does determine whether the student fits into a Special Education eligibility category, defined by federal and state laws.

- Autism
- Deaf/Blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Speech/Language Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment (including Blindness)



# Assessment is the Foundation of the IEP

In addition to determining whether a student is eligible, the assessments provide the information needed to build the IEP





# Be Organized !

## Gather and organize your papers

- Work samples, report cards, state testing
- Documents from outside professionals
- Observations and surveys
- Behavior, discipline, or attendance records
- Communications from school
- Medical/Medication history



# Be Organized!

## Other Steps:

- Request your child's school file
- Read up about your child's disability
- Understand basics of testing
- List your questions, concerns, comments
- Be specific about your concerns.



# Next Steps

- Parents can submit private assessments for the team to “consider.” It is good to make sure prior to paying for the assessment that it will fit the school’s criteria.
- If you are in agreement with assessments and findings, proceed to develop or revise IEP.
- If you are not in agreement with the assessment or eligibility decision from assessment ...



# What if you disagree?



# What if you disagree?

- Sign in disagreement.
- Request the district do additional assessment or subtests.
- Request an IEE (Independent Education Evaluation) at district expense – the parent is entitled to one IEE for each assessment the parent disagrees with (unless the school district files for due process to defend its evaluation and prevails).



# What if you disagree?

- An IEE at public expense automatically meets the school's criteria.
- The District must proceed with the IEE unless they file for due process to prove the original assessment is valid.
- Consider Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).
- Use formal Dispute Resolution Processes.



# Keeping perspective

- A child is more than an assessment, life is more than school.
- Make strengths more important than weaknesses.
- Living with ambiguity – Needs can be complex or unclear even after assessment.





# Effective and Collaborative Communication



Remember the 3 Cs:  
**Communication**  
**Cooperation**  
**Collaboration**

# How to talk so schools will listen ... and listen so schools will talk



- Acknowledge and process your emotions.
- Focus on your child's needs.
- Listen & ask questions; repeat, reflect, and rephrase for clarification.
- Build on small agreements.
- Use humor and be appreciative; show respect.
- Be grateful and assume your IEP team is doing the best they can!

# Begin Conflict Resolution at the Lowest Level

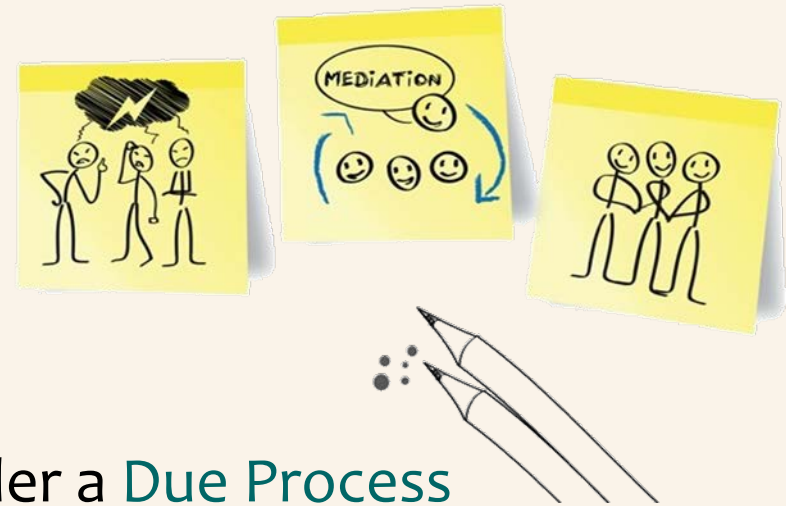
If you're having concerns or issues that effective communication, collaboration, and cooperation are not solving, be ready to climb the conflict resolution ladder.



Educate yourself as to your options: the [Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education](#) is a great place to start

# Begin Conflict Resolution at the Lowest Level

- Call Matrix to discuss and strategize
- Connect with teacher, principal, district program manager, special education director
- Call an IEP meeting; consider a facilitated IEP meeting
- Consider Alternative Dispute Resolution or Mediation
- If necessary, file a [State Compliance Complaint](#) or consider a [Due Process Complaint with the Office of Administrative Hearings](#)



***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.***

Margaret Mead







**Want to find out what's new in Special Education?**

**Want to get involved?**

**Want to make a change?**

Consider joining your local school district's  
**Community Advisory Committee (CAC)**

[Find out about CACs in counties we serve](#)

[Find out about SELPAs in the counties we serve](#)



## Other ways parents can be involved:

Volunteer opportunities at school: in the classroom, PTA, special ed PTA, attend school site council and school board meetings

Investigate the [CA Special Education Advisory Commission](#) and the [CA State Department of Education Board](#)

Lead by example and encourage your child to get involved!



# The Gift of Self-Advocacy

“Nothing About Us Without Us”

- James Charlton

“Expresses the conviction of people with disabilities that they know what is best for them”

Short videos:

[Self-Advocacy: Find the Captain in You!](#)

[10 Self-Advocacy Tips for Young People with Disabilities - for Youth by Youth](#)

[I'm Determined \(VA Dept of Ed\)](#)

[CADRE Student-Led IEPs \(from DC\)](#)

[Whose Future Is It Anyway?](#)

[CADRE Self-Determination Series](#)

[Parent Center Hub Self-Advocacy](#)

[Dude, Where's My Transition Plan](#)

[Understood.org: Self-Awareness Worksheets](#)

[Understood.org: Self-Awareness Resources](#)

[Learn with Two Rivers Student-Led IEPs](#)



# Q & A

**The ability to ask  
the right question is  
the single most  
important skill!**

