

What Is Exceptional Student Education for Children Who Are Gifted?

In Florida, children who have special learning needs are called exceptional students. Exceptional students include children who are gifted and children who have disabilities. Children who are considered gifted are those children with superior intellectual development and who are capable of high performance. The purpose of exceptional student education (ESE) is to help each child with an exceptionality to progress in public school and prepare for life after school. ESE services include specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the exceptional student. There is no charge for these special services.

Referral for Individual Evaluation

Some children are referred for an individual evaluation because they show a high ability to reason or a rapid rate of learning as compared to their peers, or they are referred based on their high scores on state or district assessments. Generally, several strategies are tried to give these children more opportunities to progress in the regular classroom. If these strategies are not effective, the parent or the school staff will then refer the child for an evaluation to determine if they are eligible for ESE gifted services.

Individual Evaluation

An individual evaluation is a way of collecting information about a child's learning needs, strengths, problems, and interests. The evaluation may include tests, observations, interviews, or other ways of gathering information. In order for a child to be individually evaluated, the parent or guardian must give written consent.

Eligibility Determination

After the evaluation, the school holds a meeting called an eligibility staffing. The team at the eligibility staffing discusses the information collected about the child. Then the team determines whether the child is eligible for ESE services. To receive ESE services as a gifted student, the child must meet the criteria listed in Rule 6A-6.03019, Florida Administrative Code.

Parents Are Part of the Team!

School staff can answer parents' questions about ESE, about how parents can participate, and about parents' rights and responsibilities. Other sources of information include the school principal and the ESE administrator in the local school district office.

The rights of parents of students who are gifted are called their "procedural safeguards." Parents receive a written summary of their procedural safeguards when they are asked to give their consent for their child to be individually evaluated.

What Happens if the Child Is Eligible?

Development of the First Educational Plan (EP)

If the child is eligible for ESE services, the next step is to hold a meeting to write an EP for the student. The child's parents are invited to this meeting as members of the EP team. The EP team documents the child's present levels of performance, establishes goals for the child, and determines how progress will be measured and reported. Also, the EP team determines what special services are needed for the child to make progress and achieve his or her goals.

The EP team also decides where the child will receive services. Most children who are gifted spend the majority of their school day in general education classrooms. Some children may leave the general education classroom for part of the day to receive services in a gifted class. A few children may spend all day in a gifted class.

Consent for Services to Begin

After the first EP has been written, the parent is asked to give written consent for the child to receive ESE services. A child cannot receive ESE services for the first time until the EP is written and the parent has given written consent for placement.

Review and Revision of EP

For students in grades kindergarten through 8, the EP team meets at least every three years to discuss the student's progress and revise the EP. For students in grades 9 through 12, the EP team meets at least every four years to talk about the student's progress and revise the EP. Of course, the child's needs may change at any time, so the parent, teacher, or other team members may ask for an EP meeting at any time. The child's services can only be changed during an EP meeting.

Note: Programs for students with disabilities are also part of ESE. However, the process for serving students with disabilities is not the same as the process described above. For more information, contact the school district's ESE administrator.

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