

The Special Education Process, Referral Through Reevaluation

Stages, decision points, consents, the paper trail, and the disagreement options the federal regulations describe

A MAP OF A PROCESS — NOT A RECOMMENDATION ABOUT ANY CHILD

Nothing on this sheet decides eligibility, services, placement, or whether a rule was broken. Federal regulations set a floor that states and districts build on, so confirm every step and every day count with your state education agency and your state's federally funded Parent Center.

USE THIS SHEET FOR Seeing the whole sequence at once, and knowing what document each step should generate	DO NOT USE IT FOR Deciding anything about an individual child, or quoting rules to a district
FRAMEWORK IDEA Part B regulations, 34 CFR Part 300	TIMELINES SHOWN The federal minimum only; states may be shorter, and often add steps
CONTENT REVIEWED September 2027 against the sources in Section 9	COMPANION HANDOUT Sheet 4, preparing for an IEP Team meeting, covers notices and questions in more detail
FREE INDIVIDUAL HELP Your state's Parent Center, at no cost to families	THIS ORGANISATION A community group; not a district, not a state agency, not a Parent Center

1. HOW TO READ THIS ROADMAP

1. Read the stage table once end to end. Most of the confusion families describe comes from not knowing which stage they are in.

2. For the stage you are in, note the document column. If the document has not arrived, that is usually the most useful thing to ask about.

3. Treat every day count as federal-floor only, and write your state's number next to it once you have looked it up.

4. Keep the paper trail in Section 5 in date order. It is the single practice that makes every later step easier.

5. When a question is about your child rather than about the process, stop and take it to your state's Parent Center or to the district.

Who we are, and are not: Rowan Bay Family Resource Network is a community organization. It is not a school district, not a state education agency, and not the federally funded Parent Training and Information Center for any state. Every state and territory has at least one federally funded Parent Center, and that center — not this handout — is the place to take a question about your own child. Find yours at parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/.

Companion handout: Sheet 4 goes into detail on who is on the IEP Team, the difference between the three notices, what prior written notice must contain, and what to gather before a meeting. This sheet is the map; that one is the preparation.

2. THE EIGHT STAGES

STAGE	WHAT THE REGULATIONS DESCRIBE	WHO DECIDES	NOTICE OR CONSENT TRIGGERED	SECTIONS	WHAT FAMILIES MOST OFTEN ASK HERE
1 — Child find and referral	The state and public agencies identify, locate, and evaluate children who may need special education. A referral can come from the agency or from a parent's request.	Agency staff, or a parent, starts the process	Prior written notice attaches when the agency proposes or refuses to evaluate; the safeguards notice is given on initial referral or parent request for evaluation	§300.111, §300.301(b), §300.504(a)(1)	"Does asking in writing matter?" Yes — it dates the request.
2 — Consent for evaluation	The agency seeks informed written consent before conducting an initial evaluation. Consent for evaluation is not consent for services.	The parent decides	Request for consent, plus prior written notice describing the evaluation procedures proposed	§300.300(a), §300.304(a), §300.9	"What am I agreeing to?" Read the list of proposed procedures.
3 — Evaluation	A full and individual evaluation using a variety of assessment tools, in the child's native language or mode of communication, not relying on any single measure.	Qualified evaluators selected by the agency	None triggered mid-evaluation, but records become requestable as they are created	§300.301, §300.304–§300.306	"How long can this take?" See the timeline row in the meeting-prep handout.
4 — Eligibility determination	A group of qualified professionals and the parent determine whether the child is a child with a disability and what the child's educational needs are. The parent receives a copy of the evaluation report and the eligibility documentation.	The group described in §300.306(a)(1), which includes the parent	Prior written notice of the determination	§300.306	"Who decides?" A group, and the parent is in it.
5 — IEP development	If the child is eligible, the IEP Team develops an IEP with present levels, measurable annual goals, how progress will be measured and reported, services, and an explanation of the extent of non-participation with nondisabled children.	The IEP Team described in §300.321	Meeting invitation before, prior written notice after, consent before the initial provision of services	§300.320, §300.321, §300.322, §300.323(c), §300.300(b)	"What will be in writing?" Everything in §300.320(a).
6 — Implementation and progress reporting	The IEP is made accessible to each teacher and provider responsible for it, each is informed of their specific responsibilities, and progress toward goals is reported on the schedule the IEP states.	The public agency	Periodic progress reports as specified in the IEP itself	§300.323(d), §300.320(a)(3)	"How will I know it is happening?" The reports the IEP promises.
7 — Review, revision, and amendment	The IEP Team reviews the IEP not less than annually, and revises it as appropriate. After the annual meeting for a school year, the parent and agency may agree to amend the IEP without a meeting.	The IEP Team, or the parent and agency by written agreement	Prior written notice for changes; a revised copy on request	§300.324(b), §300.324(a)(4) and (6)	"Do we need a whole meeting?" Not always — see §300.324(a)(4).
8 — Reevaluation, transition, and exit	Reevaluation at least every three years unless the parent and agency agree it is unnecessary; transition planning beginning with the IEP in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if the team decides; and evaluation before certain exits.	The IEP Team and evaluators	Consent for reevaluation, prior written notice, and a summary of performance on graduation with a regular diploma or aging out	§300.303, §300.320(b), §300.305(e)	"Does this ever stop?" Yes, and §300.305(e) describes what happens then.

Stages are drawn in order for clarity, but the process is not always linear: a parent can request an evaluation at any point, a reevaluation can be requested by a parent or a teacher, and a team can reconvene between annual reviews.

3. CONSENT: THE FOUR MOMENTS THE REGULATIONS SINGLE OUT — §300.300

CONSENT FOR	WHAT YOU ARE AGREEING TO	IF A PARENT DECLINES OR DOES NOT RESPOND	WORTH KNOWING	SECTION
Initial evaluation	Agreeing that the agency may conduct the first full evaluation	The agency may, but is not required to, pursue the evaluation using mediation or due process procedures, except as limited for certain children	Consent for an initial evaluation is not consent for services	§300.300(a)
Initial provision of special education and related services	Agreeing that services described in the first IEP may begin	The agency must not provide the services and must not use mediation or due process to override the refusal; the agency is then not in violation of its FAPE obligation for those services	This is a separate consent from the evaluation consent	§300.300(b)
Reevaluation	Agreeing that the agency may reevaluate	The agency may proceed if it can demonstrate reasonable efforts to obtain consent and the parent failed to respond	Informed parental consent need not be obtained if the agency can demonstrate those reasonable efforts	§300.300(c)
Revoking consent for services	Withdrawing agreement to the continued provision of all special education and related services, in writing	The agency must provide prior written notice before ceasing services, and must not use mediation or due process to challenge the revocation	Revocation applies to all services, not to a single service	§300.300(b)(4)

Consent under §300.9 means the parent has been fully informed of all information relevant to the activity, in their native language or other mode of communication, understands and agrees in writing, and understands that the consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any time — though revoking is not retroactive to an action that already occurred.

4. THE DOCUMENTS THIS PROCESS GENERATES, AND WHY EACH ONE MATTERS LATER

DOCUMENT	WHO ISSUES IT	WHEN	WHY IT MATTERS LATER	SECTION
Meeting invitation	The public agency	Before each IEP Team meeting	It establishes what the meeting was for and who was expected	§300.322(b)
Prior written notice	The public agency	A reasonable time before it proposes or refuses an action	It is the only document that states the agency's reasons and the options it rejected	§300.503
Procedural safeguards notice	The public agency	Once a school year plus the listed trigger events	It is the reference document for every process question that follows	§300.504
Evaluation report and eligibility documentation	The evaluation group	On completion of the evaluation	It is the basis the notices refer back to	§300.306(a)(2)
The IEP itself	The IEP Team	Before services and at each revision	It states what is promised and how progress will be reported	§300.320
Goal progress reports	The public agency	On the schedule the IEP states	It is the running record of whether the promise is being met	§300.320(a)(3)
Your written requests and their replies	You, and the agency	Whenever you ask for something	A dated written request starts the clocks that matter, including the 45-day records clock	§300.613
Your own contemporaneous notes	You	Same day, every time	It is the only record that captures what was said rather than what was filed	—

5. A PAPER TRAIL LOG YOU CAN COPY

DATE	DOCUMENT OR CONTACT	FROM → TO	ACTION IT REQUIRES	DUE BY	FILED AT
09/12/2027	Written request for initial evaluation	Parent → Director of Special Education	Consent form or written response	09/26/2027	Binder tab 1
09/18/2027	Procedural safeguards notice received	District → Parent	Read and file	—	Binder tab 1
09/22/2027	Consent for initial evaluation signed	Parent → District	Evaluation window begins on receipt	Per state timeframe	Binder tab 2
11/14/2027	Evaluation report received	District → Parent	Read before the meeting	11/20/2027	Binder tab 3
11/20/2027	Meeting invitation received	District → Parent	Confirm attendance; request interpreter	11/22/2027	Binder tab 1
12/01/2027	IEP Team meeting held	All	Write own summary the same evening	12/01/2027	Binder tab 4

The first six rows show the shape of a log rather than any particular child's history. Keep one row per document and per contact, including phone calls, and file the paper in the same order.

6. WHEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS DISAGREE — THE OPTIONS IDEA DESCRIBES

OPTION	WHAT IT IS	WHO RUNS IT	WHERE IT IS WRITTEN	KEY FEATURES	WHAT IT DOES NOT DO
Ask for another IEP Team meeting	A request to the district to reconvene the team	The district	Not a formal IDEA dispute mechanism; the team process itself	Fastest route; keeps the conversation with the people who know the child	Creates no independent decision-maker
State-offered IEP facilitation	A neutral facilitator helps the team run its own meeting	Many state education agencies offer it; it is not required by IDEA	Availability and rules vary entirely by state	Voluntary; the team still makes the decisions	Not a federal entitlement — check whether your state offers it
Mediation	A voluntary process in which a qualified and impartial mediator helps the parties reach agreement	The state education agency, from a list of qualified mediators selected on an impartial basis	§300.506	Voluntary for both parties; the state bears the cost; discussions are confidential and may not be used as evidence later; a written signed agreement is enforceable in court	Cannot be used to deny or delay a parent's right to a hearing
State complaint	A written, signed complaint that a public agency has violated a Part B requirement	The state education agency investigates and issues a written decision	§§300.151–300.153	Must allege a violation that occurred not more than one year before the complaint is received; the SEA has a 60-day time limit, extendable only for exceptional circumstances or by agreement to mediate	Does not produce a hearing, and does not decide a matter already set for due process
Due process complaint and hearing	A complaint on a matter relating to identification, evaluation, placement, or FAPE, decided by an impartial hearing officer	The state's hearing system	§300.507, §300.508, §300.510, §300.515	Generally must be filed within two years of when the party knew or should have known, unless the state has an explicit different timeline; a resolution meeting within 15 days; a 30-day resolution period; a decision within 45 days after that period expires	It is an adversarial legal process; this handout does not advise on whether to use it
Independent educational evaluation	A parent's right to an evaluation by a qualified examiner not employed by the agency	The parent selects; the agency responds	§300.502	A parent has the right to an IEE at public expense if the parent disagrees with the agency's evaluation, subject to the conditions in §300.502(b)	Not automatic — read §300.502(b) and your state's criteria

These options are not a ladder and this handout does not rank them, recommend one, or suggest when to use any of them. Which option fits a situation depends on facts, on state procedures, and often on advice this organization is not able to give. CADRE, the national center on dispute resolution in special education, publishes neutral material on all of them at cadreworks.org, and the Center for Parent Information and Resources explains each at parentcenterhub.org/disputes/.

7. VOCABULARY THE NOTICES WILL USE

FAPE	Free appropriate public education — the standard the Part B regulations are built around
LRE	Least restrictive environment — the requirement at §§300.114–300.118 about where services are delivered
IEP	Individualized education program — the written statement described at §300.320
IEE	Independent educational evaluation — §300.502
PWN	Prior written notice — §300.503
LEA	Local educational agency — usually your school district
SEA	State educational agency — your state's department of education
Part B	The part of IDEA covering children aged 3 through 21; Part C covers infants and toddlers
PTI	Parent Training and Information Center — the federally funded center in every state
CPRC	Community Parent Resource Center — a federally funded center serving a specific community
CADRE	The national center on dispute resolution in special education
Child find	The obligation at §300.111 to identify, locate, and evaluate children who may need special education

8. QUESTIONS THIS ROADMAP CANNOT ANSWER

THE QUESTION	WHY IT IS NOT ANSWERED HERE	WHERE IT GOES
“Is my child eligible?”	Eligibility is determined by the group described in §300.306 using evaluation data about one child	The public school district's special education office
“What services or placement should be in the IEP?”	Those are individual decisions made by the IEP Team, and no handout can make them	The IEP Team, with your state's Parent Center for free orientation
“Did the district violate a rule?”	That is a legal determination made through the processes in Section 6, not by a general handout	Your state education agency's dispute resolution office; CADRE explains the options neutrally
“What is my state's evaluation timeline?”	§300.301(c)(1)(ii) lets each state set its own timeframe in place of the federal 60 days	Your state education agency's special education rules
“What does my child's test score mean?”	Interpreting an assessment for an individual child is clinical or educational judgement	The evaluator who administered it, and the team member described at §300.321(a)(5)
“Should I get a lawyer or an advocate?”	The Network does not practise law, represent families, or recommend representation	Your state's Parent Center can describe what options exist in your state
“Can I record the meeting?”	The Part B regulations do not address recording; it is governed by state and district policy	Your district's policy, in writing, and your state education agency
“What about Section 504 or the ADA?”	Those are different laws with different processes, not covered by this handout	The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights

9. SOURCES, AND HOW TO CHECK WHETHER THIS SHEET IS STILL CURRENT

SOURCE	PUBLISHER	WHAT IT COVERS	ADDRESS
IDEA website — statute and regulations	U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs	The full text of IDEA and the Part B regulations, section by section, with the Department's model forms and guidance	sites.ed.gov/idea/
34 CFR §300.321 — IEP Team	U.S. Department of Education	Who the regulation requires on the IEP Team, and the written-agreement and written-input conditions for excusing a member	sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.321
34 CFR §300.503 — Prior written notice	U.S. Department of Education	When notice is required, the content it must include, and the understandable-language and native-language requirements	sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/e/300.503
34 CFR §300.504 — Procedural safeguards notice	U.S. Department of Education	How often the safeguards notice is given, the events that trigger an extra copy, and everything the notice must explain	sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/e/300.504
34 CFR §300.301 — Initial evaluations	U.S. Department of Education	The 60-day evaluation timeframe, the State-timeframe alternative, and the two exceptions	sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.301
34 CFR Part 300 — current text	Electronic Code of Federal Regulations	The continuously updated official text of Part 300, useful for checking whether a section has been amended since this edition	ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-300
Center for Parent Information and Resources	Federally funded technical assistance center for Parent Centers	Plain-language explanations of parental rights, prior written notice, the IEP Team, evaluation, records, and dispute resolution	parentcenterhub.org
Find Your Parent Center	Center for Parent Information and Resources	The directory of federally funded Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers by state	parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/
CADRE	National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education	Neutral material on facilitation, mediation, state complaints, and due process, including what each option does and does not do	cadreworks.org
Student Privacy Policy Office	U.S. Department of Education	FERPA rights of access, the right to request amendment of a record, and how those rights sit alongside the IDEA records provisions	studentprivacy.ed.gov

Three specific pages are worth bookmarking for the dispute options in Section 6: parentcenterhub.org/mediation/, parentcenterhub.org/statecomplaint/, and parentcenterhub.org/dueprocess/. Records questions are covered at parentcenterhub.org/records/.

10. BEFORE YOU RELY ON ANYTHING ON THIS SHEET

Jurisdiction and currency: Everything described here is the federal floor set by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its Part B regulations at 34 CFR Part 300. States and territories may set shorter timelines, add steps, and provide procedures that go beyond the federal minimum, and school districts add local forms and routing on top of that. Before you rely on any timeframe in this handout, confirm it against your state education agency's special education rules and your state's Parent Center. Regulations are also amended; check the edition date on this handout against the current text at the sources listed inside.

Scope: This handout is general process orientation. It does not decide whether a child is eligible for special education, does not recommend an evaluation, a placement, a service, a setting, a goal, an accommodation, or a diagnosis, and it is not legal, clinical, medical, or educational advice about any individual child. No part of it creates a right, and no part of it should be quoted to a school as though it were a rule.

Regulation text is summarised, not reproduced, and section references are provided so that the original can be read. Where this sheet paraphrases 34 CFR Part 300, the regulation itself controls, and the text in force when you read this may differ from the text reviewed for this edition. Every timeframe shown is the federal minimum; states and territories may set different or additional requirements, including a state evaluation timeframe that replaces the federal 60 days, and local districts add their own forms and routing. This sheet is general information and is not legal, clinical, medical, or educational advice, does not create an advocacy or professional relationship, and must not be used to decide eligibility, evaluation, placement, services, goals, accommodations, discipline, or dispute strategy for any individual child. Rowan Bay Family Resource Network, its staff, its addresses, and the dates in the sample log are invented for a demonstration set and describe no real organisation or child.