

Section 2

Referral and Assessment

PRE-REFERRAL AND ASSESSMENT

Communication is one of the *Successful Habits of Mind*, which the Ipswich Public Schools stress as key in a twenty-first century evaluation. In special education, COMMUNICATION is critically important.

It is the goal of the Ipswich Public Schools to provide an environment meets the needs of all students. This means that as much as possible, the District strives to provide a continuum of supportive services and programs that address student need within the least restrictive environment. While some portion of the school population may require services in a separate setting, both the law and “right thing to do” require that districts look at the needs of students within the context of the total school environment. School environments should have the following supports for ALL students:

- A District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP), which is a list of strategies and supports intended to assist the regular classroom teacher in analyzing and accommodating the diverse learning needs of all students.
- DCAP accommodations address a continuum of direct and systematic instruction in reading, mathematics, and writing, as well as services that can address the needs of students whose behavior may stand in the way of learning.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requires that not only special educators, but also general educators and paraprofessionals (previously referred to as Teaching Assistants) receive training in understanding and supporting diverse learning needs, as well as collaborating with other educators to address learning needs in the general education classroom.
- A document, *Is Special Education the Right Service?*, can be found on the DESE website, http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/ta/elig_drft01.pdf and details these supports.

DISTRICT CURRICULUM ACCOMMODATION PLAN

Massachusetts General Laws require the adoption and implementation of a District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP), which is intended to guide principals and teachers in ensuring that all possible efforts are made to meet student needs in general education classrooms and support teachers in analyzing and accommodating the wide range of student learning styles and needs that exist in each school. The DCAP describes accommodations and instructional supports and strategies that are available in general education.

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 38Q1/2

"A school district shall adopt and implement a curriculum accommodation plan to assist principals in ensuring that all efforts have been made to meet the students' needs in regular education. The plan shall be designed to assist the regular classroom teacher in analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all children in the regular classroom and in providing appropriate services and support within the regular education programming, including, but not limited to, direct and systematic instruction in reading and provision of services to address the needs of children whose behavior may interfere with learning or who do not qualify for special education services under chapter 71B. The curriculum accommodation plan shall include provisions encouraging teacher mentoring and collaboration and parental involvement."

The Ipswich Public School District's Mission Statement is:

The Ipswich school community is committed to developing, in all students, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed and excel throughout life.

Supporting Student Learning

The following list is representative of suggested strategies, but not inclusive of all strategies that may be successful with individual students. Accommodation may involve classroom instruction, student responses and performance criteria, teaching environments or materials. The supports are considered "District Accommodation" strategies because they are available to all students, on an as-needed basis, as determined by the general education teacher. Classroom teachers are aware that, although not all of their students will actually require all of the accommodations, use of the accommodations does not require a prerequisite condition such as testing or identification as a special education student or student with Section 504 needs.

Ipswich Public Schools Instructional Support Teams

Instructional support teams are building-based groups of teachers and counselors who meet regularly to problem-solve learning challenges for individual students. These teams recommend strategies, monitor interventions, and work collaboratively to identify appropriate building resources for children with learning, attendance, and/or social-emotional challenges.

Ipswich Public Schools Building-Based Resources

Each building in the District provides a variety of resources to support general education students with learning challenges. Resources may include, but are not limited to the following:

Personal Consultation	Intervention
Assistive Technology Specialist Guidance Counselor Reading Specialist School Adjustment Counselor School Social Worker School Psychologist	Reading Support Math Support Academic Support MCAS Preparation Developmental Guidance Social Skills Curriculum Counseling - 1:1 or small group Direct help with classroom teacher Assistive Technology

CURRICULUM/INSTRUCTION/ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Environmental/Technological Supports

- Provide preferential seating and/or flexible seating arrangements for priority access to instruction
- Arrange partner or small group instruction
- Provide scheduled or unscheduled breaks
- Allow the use of word processing for assignments and assessments
- Be alert to environmental distractors such as background lighting or noise and provide ways to mitigate their impact (e.g., move a student with noise sensitivity away from the sound of the heating unit)
- Offer a copy of teacher or peer notes, Powerpoint presentations, and/or note-taking templates
- When possible, circulate the classroom to monitor student engagement
- Use technology and computer assisted instruction

Accommodations to Delivery of Instruction

- Break down tasks into manageable steps
- Provide homework assignment books for homework follow-up
- Frequent progress monitoring and feedback to student on progress
- Use checklists, teacher check-ins, calendars, and project organizers to break down long-term assignments
- Repeat or re-teach concepts with a different approach
- Repeat and clarify directions
- Utilize peer tutoring
- Provide cueing and “wait time” or “think time” to encourage participants
- Utilize multi-modal presentation of instruction and materials
- Offer access to manipulatives

- Provide reference tools, websites, and textbooks for homework support
- Utilize study guides
- Instruct students in study skills and note taking and model these skills during instruction
- Teach students to use graphic organizers and templates as supports for both written expression, as well as way in which to organize their notetaking.
- Develop student academic improvement plans
- Allow alternatives to assignments requiring copying
- Cue student prior to transitions
- Use rubrics and examples of completed assignments and projects
- Schedule before- and after-school review sessions
- Employ flexible groupings
- Pre-teach vocabulary
- Utilize pictorial and visual directions
- Teach students to recognize implicit cueing such as bold and highlighting in texts
- Use concrete examples of concepts before teaching the abstract
- Allow use of occupational/stress management tools (i.e., stress balls, weighted vests, fidget toys, etc.)
- Frequent reminders of due dates

Accommodations to Assessments

- Allow extended time for assessments when appropriate, up to 50% additional time, in order for a student's knowledge or mastery of content to be demonstrated
- Provide multi-modal assessment to demonstrate knowledge of content or process
- Utilize alternative assessments, i.e., oral, multiple choice, computer-based (except reading tests)
- Utilize technology and computer-assisted assessment
- Administer assessments in shorter periods
- Preview language of test questions
- Provide visual directions
- Elementary: Provide tests orally and/or read test to student
- Allow the use of noise cancelling earplugs or headphones (not attached to a device)

<h3>BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES</h3>
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- Post clear and consistent classroom expectations in view of all students
- Discuss and post classroom norms and standards of behavior
- Teach behavioral expectations across settings and review/re-teach following school breaks
- Arrange seating to prevent behavioral difficulties or natural distractions
- Develop individual behavioral improvement plans with motivating incentives
- Utilize charts and graphs to monitor expectations
- Include movement breaks and energizers during instructional periods
- Provide self-monitoring checklists, coaching, and strategies
- Offer check-ins to reinforce positive expectations and review progress
- Parent and student communication regarding progress
- Allow student to access counselor, when needed
- Help students identify and build relationships with trusted adults in the community

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

- Provide daily visual schedule and agenda
- Provide all assignments in writing
- Implement a progress monitoring system with students
- Use cooperative learning strategies
- Increase parent communication, share common strategies between school and home
- Use graphic organizers
- Check for understanding and review
- Have the student repeat directions in his/her own words
- Use study sheets to organize material
- Create timelines for long-term assignments
- Check homework planner for accurate recording of assignments
- Post homework and assignments online
- Access assistive technology supports

MATERIALS

- Adjust and adapt physical appearance of worksheets/packets/assessments
- Audiobooks
- Textbooks in digital format
- Use of supplementary materials to support key concepts
- Offer large print or electronic material
- Provide marker to guide reading
- Offer large graph paper for math
- Require all students to use an organization system to keep track of assignments and deadlines (i.e., assignment notebook, smartphone calendar apps)
- Access to computers for written assignments
- Provide page numbers for easy location of materials

PRE-REFERRAL PROCESS

In order to ensure a *Just Right* formula (no more services than needed; no fewer services than needed), best practice guides us to gather data or available information before deciding that the student requires special education. The chart on the next page, taken from the *Is Special Education the Right Service?* guide, provides a visual schema of the careful planning that should precede any special education referral. Although following this process represents good practice, it should, nonetheless, be noted that the parent can request that the evaluation go forward while the information-gathering is taking place.

At the building level, each school in Ipswich has a pre-referral team to examine student needs. The composition of the team varies somewhat from building to building, but usually includes an administrator, general educator, and specialists who can examine the presenting need, explore the supports currently in place, and determine what additional supports should be considered as interventions prior to suggesting a formal evaluation. The purpose of the pre-referral team is not to delay any student receiving services, but rather, to ensure that the student is not being limited by moving too quickly into services that may be too restrictive. Whenever data on a student is being considered for analysis by a pre-referral team, COMMUNICATION with the parent is the important first step. It is critical for parents to understand the areas of concern and how the school is proceeding in examining them. At times, parents may have concerns of their own, and so COMMUNICATION involves not only transparency regarding building efforts, but also inviting parent partnership with the school in examining student needs.

There will be times when either the pre-referral suggestions or growth of the student address the issue and it ceases to be a problem. If the difficulty persists after the strategies have been tried for a reasonable period of time and there are still concerns, a referral may be made for special education evaluation.

REFERRAL PROCESS

A student may be referred for a special education evaluation by a parent or professional who is working with that student. Although not required, reasonable efforts to examine the student's response to non-special education interventions should be tried before making a referral to special education.

When a student is referred for a special education evaluation, the District must send parents/guardians a form requesting their permission to test within five days of receipt of the parent request. The parents must sign and return the consent forms for testing to commence. The Program Manager at the student's school makes an attempt to communicate with the parents so that the tests agreed-upon address the areas of the presenting problem(s).

The District is required to complete the assessments within thirty (30) working school days of receipt of signed permission. The Team meeting to review the results of the testing must take place within 45 working school days of receipt of testing. The District makes a copy of the evaluation results available to the parents/guardians two (2) days prior to the meeting in order to allow time to carefully review the recommendations.

The District is required to assess the child in all areas related to the suspected disability. The education assessment is a required assessment. Other evaluative areas can and often include:

- Intellectual assessment
- Achievement testing
- Assessment in related service areas including Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech and Language

Even where an evaluation may have been completed by an outside agency, the District will conduct its own testing since clinical and educational evaluations may differ in both scope and focus.

ASSESSMENT

When the parents and the school district suspect that the student may have a disability, the parents are asked to consent to a special education evaluation, which will determine if the student is eligible for services. It is Ipswich practice that parents are given an opportunity to consult with the District regarding the types of assessments and assessors used for an evaluation. This does not mean that the parents will choose WHICH tests are completed or WHO will conduct the evaluation. Rather, the District seeks to have a clear understanding of the presenting problem in order to investigate the needs in an organized and thorough manner. Parents have unique information about the needs of their children, and may be able to provide information relevant to particular issues or concerns that they see. This is another important element of the COMMUNICATION process in the Ipswich schools.

Key in determining, which assessments will be administered is the understanding that special education is reserved for students who have disabilities that cause difficulty in learning; therefore, Ipswich conducts assessments in the **area of suspected disability**. The table included in the Team Meeting section is taken from *Is Special Education the Right Service?* and gives definitions of the disability categories that qualify the student to receive special education services. Parents will recognize this list later because it will be present at the Team meeting and serve as a guide for the Team. Once again, COMMUNICATION is key because the school Team will want to ensure sufficient testing to examine the need, but not over-test. The actual determination of WHICH evaluative instruments are used is made through the COMMUNICATION including the parent, Program Manager (who will steer the evaluation process and hold the eligibility meeting) and the School Psychologist and other related service providers who will complete the evaluations. The term “related service providers” refers to the speech & language pathologist/therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, or other professionals who would conduct the evaluation in the areas of suspected disability.

An important qualifier in determining the items for the Test Consent form is that DESE makes it very clear that a disability in special education is connected to its educational impact. It is not the disability label alone that prompts a determination of eligibility for special education. A student may have a disability, but may not require services because he/she is making effective progress in the classroom. Evaluation instruments will be chosen to examine any impact of the disability on the student’s access to learning.

Required Assessments

Assessment in the Area of Suspected Disability: This testing may involve testing by a speech & language therapist, physical therapist, special education reading specialist, occupational therapist, school psychologist, or other evaluator depending on the pressing concern. The COMMUNICATION between the Program Manager, parent, and classroom teacher can help to determine the testing area. It should be noted that the testing does not need to be exhaustive. At the Eligibility Meeting, the Team has a mechanism called an “Extended Evaluation” if a determination is made that the student is eligible for services, but may require additional testing to fine-tune the delivery of those services.

Educational Assessment: This law requires that the Team look at the student's ability to make progress in the context of the general education classroom. As a result, the evaluation includes a

comprehensive look at the student's participation in life at the school. Comprehensive educational assessment includes:

- A history of the student's educational progress in the general curriculum
- Information regarding the student's specific abilities in regard to learning standards of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the District curriculum
- Student's attention skills, participation behaviors, communication skills, memory, and social relations with groups, peers, and adults
- The student's educational and developmental potential

Narrative Description of Student's Educational & Developmental Potential: This assessment is completed by the general education classroom teacher. It includes the following:

- A description of factors that help or hinder the student in making effective progress. The description looks for patterns that provide information relevant to the student's potential.
- An assertion as to whether this review suggests that the student has consistently performed with the range of typical students, has consistently performed better/less well than typical peers, or has demonstrated inconsistent performance.

Optional Assessments: Health, Psychological, or Home: There are several guiding principles that Ipswich Public Schools follow:

- Assessment should be comprehensive and sufficient to determine the presence/absence of a disability.
- It should evaluate the factors related to the student's performance. It should allow the Team to plan appropriate services to address these needs. No single assessment is to be used to make the determination.
- Assessments should be appropriate to the needs of the student being assessed.
- Assessments may include both formal (normative) data as well as informal (observational or non-normative data).

Best practice strongly discourages parents requesting a "menu" of tests to be administered. In a manner similar to a physician choosing laboratory tests for a patient, deference should be given to the participating professional in determining appropriate and specific testing in his/her specialty. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that there may, at times, be compelling reasons for a particular request, and this should be carefully discussed with the Program manager and evaluator(s). The Ipswich Team may recommend Health, Psychological, and/or Home Assessments. Parents have the option of agreeing to or rejecting these assessments. Parents also have the right to request assessments not proposed by the District. The District does not have the right to refuse to conduct another type of assessment requested by the parent if it is unrelated to the suspected disability of the student. If Ipswich does refuse to conduct such an assessment, it must provide the parent with full written notice regarding why such an assessment is unrelated to the suspected disability of the student.

A sample Evaluation Consent Form follows on the next page.

School District Name**EVALUATION CONSENT FORM
Attachment to N 1**

TYPE OF ASSESSMENTS: <i>A variety of assessment tools and strategies should be used to gather information that determines the educational needs of this student. [Check yes or no for each assessment.]</i>	RECOMMENDED	
	YES	NO
Assessment in All Areas Related to the Suspected Disability(ies) – describes the student’s performance in any area related to the child’s suspected disability(ies). List recommended assessment(s): _____ _____ _____		
Educational Assessment – includes the history of the student’s educational progress in the general curriculum and includes current information on the student’s performance.		
Observation of the Student – includes the student’s interaction in the student’s classroom environment or in a child’s natural environment or an early intervention program.		
Health Assessment – details any medical problems or constraints that may affect the student’s education.		
Psychological Assessment – describes the student’s learning capacity and learning style in relationship to social/emotional development and skills.		
Home Assessment – details any pertinent family history and home situations that may affect the student’s education and, with written consent, may include a home visit.		

PARENT RESPONSE SECTION

Please indicate your response by checking at least one (1) box and returning a signed copy to the school district. Please keep one copy for your records. Thank you.

☐ I accept the proposed evaluation in full.

☐ I reject the proposed evaluation in full.

☐ I accept the proposed evaluation in part and request that only the listed assessments be completed:

I additionally request the following assessment(s):

☐ assessment(s) listed above:

☐ other assessments: (specify)

Signature of Parent, Guardian, Educational Surrogate Parent, Student 18 and Over*

Date

**Required signature once a student reaches 18 unless there is a court appointed guardian.*

PARENT INPUT

We strongly encourage you to share your knowledge of this student with us. If you choose, please provide a written statement (use back of form) or call the indicated contact person. Thank you.