

NASET's HOW TO Series

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What the Special Education Teacher Needs to Know If Asked to Participate at the Eligibility Committee (EC)

The responsibilities of the special education teacher on the Eligibility Committee depend upon their role in the district. Your responsibilities when making a presentation will vary but proper preparation is crucial. Keep in mind the following aspects depending upon your involvement with the case:

The Special Education Teacher as Educational Evaluator

If your role on the committee has resulted from your educational and perceptual evaluation of the child, then you need to keep the following in mind:

1. Prior to the meeting, you should meet with the parents and go over your results. Follow the procedures outlined in the section **Reporting Test Results to Parents**.
2. Make sure that you have your report complete and typed at least one week to ten days prior to the Eligibility Committee meeting. In some districts, the Eligibility Committee requires that the entire packet be forwarded a week in advance.
3. Prior to the meeting, outline the important points of the report that you wish to make. Do not go through the report at the Eligibility Committee meeting looking for the issues that you feel need to be discussed. Preparation will make you look more professional.
4. Make sure you report strengths as well as weaknesses.
5. Even though everyone should have copies of your report in front of them, the length of the report may make it impossible for them to filter out the crucial sections in the time allotted for the meeting. Therefore you may want to develop a one page summary sheet which clearly outlines what you will be presenting. This would be handed out as you begin your presentation.
6. Remember that this is not a parent conference to review the entire report. You should have done that earlier, so keep it brief and highlight the important issues. There are several individuals who may need to report results or speak and the Eligibility Committee may have several meetings that day.
7. If you feel that the nature of the case may require more time than that normally set aside by the Eligibility Committee for a review, then call the chairperson and make a request for a longer meeting time. It is very uncomfortable when crucial meetings have to be ended because of time constraints.
8. Be prepared to be questioned about your findings or some aspect of the report by either a parent, committee member, lawyer (sometimes brought by the parent), and others. Even though this may not happen, you should be ready to answer without being defensive or anxious. Carefully looking over your report and being prepared is the best advice.

The Special Education Teacher as Classroom Teacher of the Child

There may be times when you will be asked as the child's classroom teacher to attend a Eligibility Committee meeting either for a review of classification, placement, annual review, change in an IEP or a special meeting requested by the parent. When this occurs, keep the following in mind.

1. The first thing you need to do when you receive a request for your participation at a Eligibility Committee meeting is to find out the reason for the meeting. The material required may vary but your preparation prior to the meeting is crucial. If the parent called the meeting you may want to have them in for a conference to discuss their concerns.

2. Once you know why the meeting will be held, organize yourself so that you will have information in front of you in the following areas:

- The child's present academic levels in reading, math, spelling and writing. These may be available as a result of recent individual or group achievement tests, informal evaluations that you may have administered, observation (although try to be more objective), class tests etc. Determine grade levels if possible, and where the child falls in comparison to others in the class.

- The child's present pattern of classroom behavior. Write this up in **behavioral terms** (factual, observable and descriptive notes of behavior that do not include analysis or judgment).

- The child's present levels of social interaction and social skills.

- The child's interest areas and areas of strength.

- The child's present schedule

- Samples of the child's work

- Outline of parent conferences, phone conversations or meetings and the purpose and outcome of each. These notes should be kept on an ongoing basis.

- Your opinion as to whether the child is benefiting from his present placement

- Any physical limitations noted and their implication on the learning process

- Your opinion on the child's self-esteem

- Any pertinent comments made by the child that may have an impact on his present situation.

3. You should be well prepared to answer any questions with the above information at hand. When it is your turn to present, do it in an organized manner. Here to you may want to provide the participants with an outline of what you will be covering.

4. Try not to be defensive even if the reason for the meeting is the parent's concern over the child's placement in your class or the workload etc. Try to listen carefully as to what the parent is really asking for. It may not be as big of a problem as you may think and try to be solution oriented, even if the parent is blame oriented.

The Special Education Teacher as a Member of the Eligibility Committee

There are times when the special education teacher will be asked to sit on the Eligibility Committee to review a case even though the teacher does not have or know the child or has not evaluated him/her. The participation of the special education teacher in this situation is for their expertise in reviewing academic and perceptual material that may be presented. This material may come from other evaluators within the district or from an outside agency or professional. If your role involves this aspect, then keep the following in mind:

1. Try to get a copy of the reports prior to the meeting. In some districts this is the procedure. If not request it so that you can review the findings and make notes.

2. Your role here is to review and analyze the test results and offer concrete and practical suggestions to the Eligibility Committee in the following ways:

- Indications of areas of strength and weakness.
- Level of severity of the problem--mild, moderate or severe
- Educational implications in determining least restrictive placement
- Whether or not the recommendations coincide with the test result findings. For example, in some cases outside agencies or professionals will recommend resource room even though the child's scores do not reflect a disability.
- Whether or not the new findings support or disagree with past scores. For this you should do some research into the child's historical academic patterns by reviewing any prior reports, achievement test scores, report card grades etc.
- Whether or not the findings require modifications and which ones they should be i.e. revised test format, flexible scheduling

3. Be prepared. Do not wait until the last minute. It will look more professional if you come with notes, questions and suggestions.