

# Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

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## EPISODE 25

In this Episode, Laurie and Abbey Interview Nancy Isaacs, former special education director in the Texas public school system. Nancy shares her perspective and experience in various professional viewpoints as she has been a general ed teacher, a special ed teacher, an educational diagnostician, a special ed coordinator and retired as a special ed director. In the podcast interview, Laurie, Abbey & Nancy talk through what the public school can and cannot do throughout the process of evaluating and accommodating students under the special education umbrella.

### **Special Education Eligibility (3 min)**

There are many different instances that can start the process of becoming eligible for special education that all lead to the same starting point, evaluation. Whether it be the student is given a diagnosis of a learning disability, a referral from a general education teacher, or even a parent inquiring more about what type of help is out there for their student, each of those roads lead to a formal evaluation. Evaluations are done for students with medically diagnosed ADHD, emotionally disturbed students, health impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, autism, and the list goes on. Nancy speaks a lot about parental consent inside of public school, and how a parent is required to give that consent at every step of the way, from evaluation to dismissal from special education. After the evaluation, it also needs to be proven that the student needs specially designed curriculum and instruction. This is typically done through a team of people, parents, administrators and teachers, in an ARD meeting, Annual Review and Dismissal meeting where the committee meets as a whole to review the students current situation, discuss the changes or plan for changes, or determine completion.

### **Can A Student Get Out of Special Education? (7 min)**

It is a common myth that once students are in special education, it is difficult to get out. No child services can be changed without an ARD meeting. Truthfully parental consent is required at every turn and a parent can also terminate any services or accommodations for their child at any time. It is of course recommended to get involved in your child's instruction, ask questions when you don't understand, ask about when accommodations are used and not used, ask about what accommodations are available even outside of special education. Many students with learning disabilities or impairments are able to find great success with classroom accommodations, or a section 504 plan. Special education may not be completely necessary in every situation, which is why really evaluating the services and progress of the student is so important. The goal is always to not need special education, and to not need 504 accommodations, and to only lean on those to perform at a necessary level.

### **Navigating Special Education as a Parent (13 min)**

Schools have specific metrics that are measured inside of special education as required by law. For example, a child cannot be "out of placement" for more than 10 days out of the school year. This means they can not be out of their agreed upon placement, whether that is due to a special school event or a substitute teacher filling in, for more than those 10 instructional days. Metrics like that are monitored by the special education teachers, coordinators and directors on a regional level. As a parent, a great way to navigate through the progress and areas of concern would be to ask questions. If your student is struggling with a specific skill, ask their teacher how it is taught at school so it can be reinforced at home. Ask the teacher do differentiate in some way, what assignments were completed with accommodations, and which were completed without. This can be as simple as a star on the paper, as to not draw attention to how this student is different from the group as a whole. Advocate for your child by developing a good relationship with their case manager and special education teacher and have regular check-ins to see how your student is performing in the classroom setting. An updated IEP or Individualized Education Plan should also be sent home at the end of each grading period with report cards to show progress made.

## Parent Resources for More Information (27 min)

Be cautious of Google searches and if you've landed on any type of information to consider online, be sure it is coming from a reputable source, and is up to date information. There are so many things out there that could be outdated or just plain incorrect. You can always call anybody in a special education department at any public school and have your questions answered. As a special education professional, Nancy assures listeners and readers of the podcast, that educators want to get the right information out there and share any knowledge they have to help students progress and find the help they may need. Talk to your child's teachers and even a diagnostician at the campus where your child attends, or a special education director for that region. They are each a wealth of knowledge and would be happy to get information into your hands for you, your student and your family. Lastly, networking with other parents who have children in special education is a great way to share experiences, stories and lessons learned that may not come up from the perspective of an educator. Find social media groups or local groups where those stories are shared.

### Resources:

Contact info for the podcast: [letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com](mailto:letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com)

E-Diagnostic Learning Website: <https://ediagnosticlearning.com>

Social:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/eDiaglearning/>

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