

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF HIGHLANDS COUNTY
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PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS FOR EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS WHO ARE GIFTED
Revised September 20, 2004

Providing parents with information regarding their rights under this rule is critical to ensuring that they have the opportunity to be partners in the decisions regarding their children. It is also critical that local school boards provide information about these rights to appropriate district and school personnel so that the needs of the student can be identified and appropriately met. The school board's policy and procedures for procedural safeguards shall be set forth in accordance with Rule 6A-6.03411, FAC., and shall include adequate provisions for the following:

I. Prior Notice

The school district shall provide parents with prior written notice a reasonable time before any proposal or refusal to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, educational placement of the student or the provision of a free appropriate public education to the student.

- A. The prior notice to the parents shall be written in language understandable to the general public and shall be provided in the native language or other mode of communication commonly used by the parent unless such communication is clearly not feasible to do so.
- B. If the parents' mode of communication is not a written language, the school district shall ensure:
 1. That the notice is translated to the parents orally or by other means in their native language or mode of communication;
 2. That the parents understand the content of the notice; and
 3. That there is written documentation that the requirements of subparagraphs (1)(b)1. and 2. of this rule have been met.
- C. The notice to the parents shall include:
 1. A description of the action proposed or refused by the district, an explanation of why the district proposes or refuses to take the action, and a description of any other options the district considered and the reasons why those options were rejected;
 2. A description of each evaluation procedure, test, record, or report the district used as a basis for the proposed or refused action;
 3. A description of any other factors that are relevant to the district's proposal or refusal; and
 4. Information on how the parent can obtain a copy of the procedural safeguards specified in this rule.

II. Content and Provision of the Procedural Safeguards to Parents

- A. Parents must be provided a copy of their procedural safeguards which provides a full explanation of the provisions included in this rule.
- B. A copy of the procedural safeguards must be available to the parents of a child who is gifted, and must be given to the parents, at a minimum:
 1. Upon initial referral for evaluation;
 2. Upon refusal of a parent's request to conduct an initial evaluation;
 3. Upon notification of each EP meeting; and
 4. Upon receipt of a request for a due process hearing by either the school district or the parent in accordance with subsection (7) of this rule.

III. Informed Parental Consent

- A. Parents shall be fully informed of all information relevant to the action for which consent is sought in their native language or other mode of communication unless such communication is clearly not feasible.
- B. Written parental consent shall be obtained prior to conducting an initial evaluation to determine eligibility and prior to initial provision of services to students who are gifted.
- C. School districts shall document the attempts to secure consent from the parent as required by paragraph (3)(b) of this rule.
- D. Parental consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any time before the action occurs.
- E. Except for formal, individual evaluation and the initial provision of services to the student, consent may not be required as a condition of any other benefit to the parent or child. Any proposal or refusal to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement or the provision of a free appropriate public education to the student after the initial placement is not subject to parental consent but is subject to prior notice as defined by subsection (1) of this rule.
- F. Parental consent is not required before:
 1. Reviewing existing data as part of an evaluation; or,
 2. Administering a test or other evaluation that is administered to all students unless, before

administration of that test or evaluation, consent is required of parents of all children.

IV. Parents' Opportunity to Examine Records and Participate in Meetings

- A. The parents of students who are gifted shall be afforded, in accordance with Rule 6A-1.0955, FAC., Section 1002.22, Florida Statutes, and this rule, an opportunity to inspect and review their child's educational records.
- B. The right to inspect and review education records under this rule includes the right to have a representative of the parent inspect and review the records including all records related to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child and the provision of a free appropriate public education to the child.
- C. The parents of a student who is gifted must be afforded an opportunity to participate in meetings with respect to the development of their child's educational plan.

V. Evaluations Obtained at Private Expense

If the parent obtains an independent evaluation at private expense which meets the requirements of subsection (4) of Rule 6A-6.0331, FAC., the results of the evaluation must be considered by the school district in any decision made with the respect to the determination of eligibility for exceptional student education services.

- A. The results of such evaluation may be presented as evidence at any hearing authorized under subsection (7) of this rule.
- B. If an administrative law judge requests an independent educational evaluation as part of a hearing, the cost of the evaluation must be at public expense, as defined in paragraph (7)(c) of Rule 6A-6.03411, FAC.

VI. State Complaint Procedures

The Department of Education shall provide parents and other interested persons the opportunity to resolve allegations that a school district has violated state requirements regarding the education of students who are gifted through the establishment of state complaint procedures.

- A. Within ninety (90) calendar days after a complaint is filed, under the provisions of this rule, the Department of Education shall:
 - 1. Carry out an independent on-site investigation, if the Department of Education determines that to be necessary;

- 2. Give the complainant the opportunity to submit additional information, either orally or in writing, about the allegations in the complaint;
- 3. Review all relevant information and make an independent determination as to whether the school district is violating a state requirement regarding the education of students who are gifted;
- 4. Issue a written decision on the complaint that addresses each issue presented in the complaint and contains findings of fact, conclusions, and the reason(s) for the Department of Education's final decision; and
- 5. Extend the time limit established in paragraph (6)(a) of this rule if exceptional circumstances exist with respect to a particular complaint.

- B. Procedures for the effective implementation of the Department of Education's final decision include the following:
 - 1. Technical assistance activities;
 - 2. Negotiations; and,
 - 3. Corrective actions to achieve compliance.

- C. Relationship to due process hearings.
 - 1. If a written complaint is received that is also the subject of a due process hearing requested pursuant to subsection (7) of this rule, or the complaint contains multiple issues, of which one or more are part of that hearing, the Department of Education shall set aside any part of the complaint that is being addressed in the due process hearing until the conclusion of the hearing. However, any issue in the complaint that is not a part of the due process action must be resolved in compliance with the procedures described in subsection (6) of this rule.
 - 2. If an issue is raised in a complaint filed under this subsection that has previously been decided in a due process hearing involving the same parties, the administrative law judge's decision is binding and the Department of Education shall inform the complainant to that effect.
 - 3. The Department of Education shall resolve any complaint that alleges that a school district has failed to implement a due process hearing decision.

VII. Due Process Hearings

Due process hearings shall be available to parents of students who are gifted and to school districts to resolve matters related to the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the student or the provision of a free appropriate public education.

- A. Such hearings may be initiated by a parent or a school district on the proposal or refusal to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the student or the provision of a free appropriate public education to the student.
- B. A hearing shall be conducted by an administrative law judge from the Division of Administrative Hearings, Department of Management Services, on behalf of the Department of Education.
- C. An administrative law judge (ALJ) shall use subsection (7) of this rule for any such hearings and shall conduct such hearings in accordance with the Uniform Rules for Administrative Proceedings, Chapter 28-106, FAC., as deemed appropriate by the ALJ including, but not limited to: the authority of a party to request a pre-hearing conference, the authority of the ALJ to issue subpoenas to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of records, and the authority of the ALJ to issue summary rulings in absence of a disputed issue of material fact.
- D. Status of student during proceedings.
 - 1. During the time that an administrative or subsequent judicial proceeding regarding a due process hearing is pending, unless the district and the parent of the student agree otherwise, the student involved in the proceeding must remain in the present educational assignment. If the proceeding involves an application for an initial admission to public school, the student, with the consent of the parent, must be placed in a public school program until the completion of all proceedings.
 - 2. If the administrative law judge agrees with the parent and finds that a change of placement is appropriate, that placement becomes the agreed-upon placement during the pendency of the appeal.
- E. Hearing rights for all parties.
 - 1. Any party to a hearing conducted pursuant to subsection (7) of this rule has the right:
 - a. To be represented by counsel or to be represented by a qualified representative under the qualifications and standards set forth in Rules 28-106.106 and 28-106.107, FAC., or to be accompanied and advised by individuals with special knowledge or training with respect to the problems of students who are gifted, or any combination of the above;
 - b. To present evidence, and to confront, cross-examine, and compel the attendance of witnesses;
 - c. To prohibit the introduction of any evidence at the hearing that has not been disclosed to that party at least five (5) business days before the hearing;
 - d. To obtain written, or at the option of the parents, electronic, verbatim record of the hearing at no cost to the parents; and
 - e. To obtain written, or at the option of the parents, electronic findings of fact and decisions at no cost to the parents.
 - 2. Additional disclosure of information.
 - a. At least five (5) business days prior to a hearing conducted pursuant to subsection (7) of this rule, each party shall disclose to all other parties all evaluations completed by that date and recommendations based on the offering party's evaluations that the party intends to use at the hearing.
 - b. An administrative law judge may bar any party that fails to comply with subparagraph (7)(e)2. of this rule from introducing the relevant evaluation or recommendation at the hearing without the consent of the other party.
- F. Parental rights at hearings. Parents involved in hearings must be given, in addition to the rights described in paragraph (7)(e) of this rule, the right to:
 - 1. Have their child who is the subject of the hearing present; and
 - 2. Open the hearing to the public.
- G. Duties and responsibilities of the superintendent or designee shall include:
 - 1. Implementing procedures that require the parent of a child who is gifted, or the attorney representing the child, to provide notice to the school district. The notice required, which must remain confidential, must include: the name of the child; the address of the residence of the child; the name of the school the child is attending; a description of the nature of the problem relating to the proposed or refused initiation or change, including facts relating to the problem; and, a proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the parents at the time. However, the school district may not deny or delay a parent's right to a due process hearing for failure to provide this notice.
 - 2. Immediately forwarding the Division of Administrative Hearings by facsimile transmission of the parent's request for a hearing upon its receipt;
 - 3. Notifying all parties regarding their rights and responsibilities before, during, and after the hearing. This notice should include information to the parent of any free or low cost legal and other relevant services, which are available, if the parent requests this information or if the parent or school district initiates a hearing.

4. Determining whether an interpreter is needed and arranging for the interpreter as required;
 5. Complying with the administrative law judge's rulings regarding requests for and exchanges of evidence; discovery; the filing of motions and, scheduling, so as to meet the requirements of this rule, and the deadlines established herein.
 6. Arranging for the provision and payment of clerical assistance, the hearing, use of facilities, and a verbatim transcript of the hearing;
 7. Completing other responsibilities specified by the school board.
- H. Duties and responsibilities of the Department of Education shall include:
1. Maintaining a list of persons who serve as administrative law judges including a statement of the qualifications of each of these persons; and,
 2. Maintaining an index of the final orders of such hearings and providing this information to the public upon request.
- I. Duties and responsibilities of an administrative law judge shall be:
1. To establish the date, time, and location of the hearing and any pre-hearing conference calls and motion hearings. Each hearing involving oral arguments must be conducted at a time and place that is reasonably convenient to the parents and their child;
 2. To conduct the hearing in a fair and impartial manner;
 3. To ensure that all discovery, motion practice, and pre-hearing procedures are conducted in an expedited manner, consistent with the deadlines established by this rule concerning the exchange of evidence and the issuance of the final decision.
 4. To determine if the parent wants an electronic or written copy of the final decision and the administrative record of the hearing;
 5. To determine whether the parent wants the hearing open to the public and whether the parent wants their child to attend the hearing;
 6. To determine whether the parent's advisor or representative is sufficiently knowledgeable about or trained regarding students who are gifted;
 7. To determine how evidence may be exchanged prior to and during the hearing;
 8. To determine how witnesses may be compelled to attend, be cross-examined, and confronted during discovery and at the hearing;
 9. To determine how evaluations and recommendations may be disclosed prior to and during a hearing;
 10. To summarize the facts and findings of the case and to arrive at an impartial decision based

- solely on information presented during the hearing;
11. To reach a final decision and mail to all parties copies of the facts, findings and decision regarding the hearing within forty-five (45) days of the district's receipt of the parent's request or the filing of the district's request for a hearing, whichever is sooner;
 12. To be accountable for compliance with all deadlines and procedures established by the statutes and rules for such hearings;
 13. To maintain the confidentiality of all information; and
 14. To rule on requests for specific extensions of time beyond the periods set forth in subsection (7) of this rule, at the request of either party.

- J. Civil action. A decision made in a hearing conducted under subsection (7) of this rule shall be final, unless, within thirty (30) days, a party aggrieved by the decision brings a civil action in state circuit court without regard to the amount in controversy, as provided in Section 1003.57(5), Florida Statutes. The state circuit court shall: receive the records of the administrative proceedings; hear, as appropriate, additional evidence at the request of a party; and, basing its decision on the preponderance of the evidence, shall grant the relief it determines appropriate. In the alternative, any party aggrieved by the administrative law judge's decision shall have the right to request an impartial review by the appropriate district court of appeal as provided by Sections 120.68 and 1003.57(5), Florida Statutes.

Specific Authority 1001.02(1)(2)(n), 1003.01(3)(a)(b), 1003.57(5) FS. Law Implemented 1001.42(4)(l) 1003.01(3)(a)(b), 1003.57(5), 1001.03(8) FS. History - New 9-20-2004.

For more information about procedural safeguards in exceptional student education, please contact,

- The exceptional student education administrator in your school district
- The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) center serving your area
- The Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services of the Florida Department of Education

Should you have any questions regarding your rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), please contact the following individuals:

- The Program/Staffing Specialist for your school
- Highlands County Schools Coordinator for Exceptional Student Education –
Connie Tzovarras Phone (863) 471-5583