

# *Tips from the Special Education Division: Cutoff Dates for Special Education Referrals*

**June 2026**

**Question: Can a school district or school building designate a cutoff date for accepting special education referrals?**

## **Answer:**

No. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), districts have an ongoing [Child Find](#) obligation, requiring them to identify, locate, and evaluate students suspected of having disabilities at any point during the school year. As a result, referrals must be accepted whenever the written referral for a special education evaluation is made or a concern arises that indicates the student has a suspected disability and potential need for special education services—whether early in the year or late in the spring.

Both IDEA and Washington Administrative Code ([WAC 392-172A](#)) further emphasize that districts may not implement practices that delay or impede the referral or evaluation process when a disability is suspected. Establishing a fixed cutoff date, even with good intentions, can create a barrier to initiating referrals and may inadvertently delay students' access to needed support(s) and services.



It is also important to note that evaluation timelines are calculated in school days ([WAC 392-172A-03005](#)), which already accounts for situations in which an evaluation initiated late in the year cannot be completed before the last day of school. In these cases, the timeline appropriately extends into the following school year, rather than requiring referrals to be limited or restricted.

**Districts must continue accepting referrals throughout the school year.**

It is recommended districts clearly communicate that evaluation timelines are calculated in school days and may extend into the next year when necessary.

