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Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Process Demystified

Support for Newcomer Families

switchboard
connecting resettlement experts



Today's Speakers



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Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

1

Define

what an Individualized Education Process (IEP). Describe the process newcomer families must navigate to access special education services for their child.

2

Identify

common challenges that newcomer families face in accessing and participating in IEP processes.

3

Apply

strategies to help newcomer families overcome challenges, demystify and destigmatize special education services, and participate actively in IEP processes.



1

Fundamentals of Special Education & IEPs

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What percentage of the public school student population is disabled?

Special Education

Guiding Beliefs



Specially designed instruction
to meet the unique needs of
a child with a disability

Protects the rights
of parents and children with
disabilities

Least restrictive environment
to ensure full participation



Equal opportunity
in the entire education
system

Academic growth
and social development

Long-term outcomes
such as employment and
independence



Special Education

Process Overview

1

Referral



2

**Evaluation and
Assessment**



3

**Eligibility
Determination**



4

IEP Development



5

**Service Delivery and
Ongoing Progress
Monitoring**





Referrals

Who can refer?

Parents, Teachers,
Administrators

When to refer?

Early Identification, Child
Find, Collaboration



Why would I refer?

Concerns with Developmental
Delays; Learning or Physical
Disabilities; Social-Emotional,
Behavioral, or Sensory
Processing

What is the process to refer?

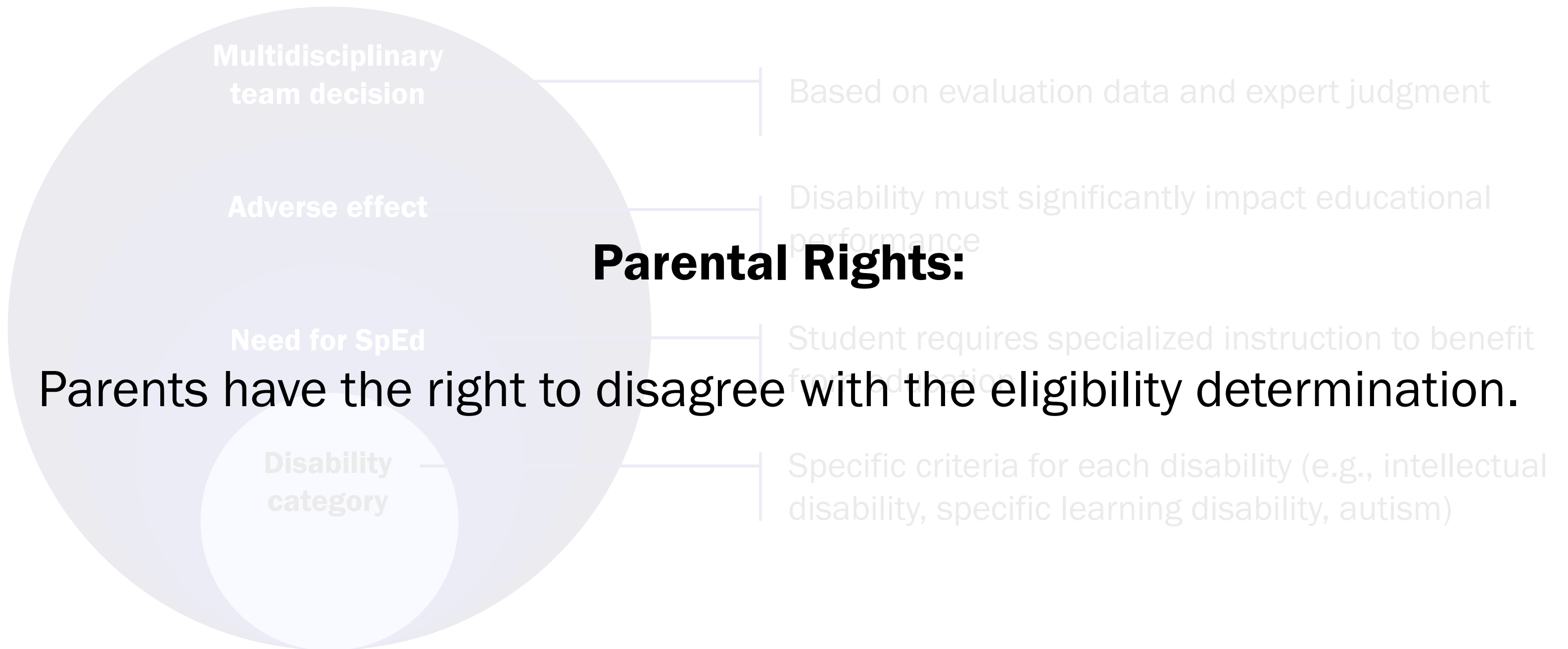
Parental Consent,
Timelines, Confidentiality



Evaluation and Assessment



Eligibility Determination





Individual Education Program (IEP)

- A written statement of the educational program designed to meet a child's individual needs
- Every child who receives special education services must have an IEP
- Legally binding



IEP

Key Components

- Specialized instruction
- Related services
- Accommodations and modifications
- Assistive technology
- Progress monitoring
- Collaboration
- Review of the IEP at least annually



Individualized Education Program (IEP)



[Student's Name]

[Date of Meeting to Develop or Review IEP]

Note: For each student with a disability beginning at age 14 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), and updated annually, a statement of the transition service needs of the student under the applicable components of the student's IEP that focuses on the student's courses of study (such as participation in advanced-placement courses or a vocational education program).

Present Levels of Educational Performance
Measurable Annual Goals (Including Benchmarks or Short-Term Objectives)

1 of 4

Use of this IEP format, or any other format, will not, in and of itself, ensure compliance with Part B requirements. Whether or not a State or local agency chooses to require or recommend that teams use this format for IEPs, it is critical that all IEP team participants, including parents, receive clear guidance and training regarding IDEA Part B requirements and the importance of the IEP in focussing instruction to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability.



IEP

Collaborative Team

Parents or guardians

Teachers

**Administrative
representative**

**Evaluation
representative**

**Others with special
expertise**

**Child (when
appropriate)**





IEP Team Meeting

- Review the student's progress
- Develop, revise, or amend the IEP
- Set measurable annual goals
- Determine appropriate special education and related services
- Discuss accommodations and modifications
- Plan for student participation in general education





Progress Monitoring

The systematic process of collecting and analyzing data to determine a student's progress towards their IEP goals, including:

- Regular assessment
- Data-based decision making
- Effective communication





Role of Service Providers

in Supporting IEPs

1

Communicate with clients regularly

2

Advocate for the child and provide families with relevant resources

3

Build a support network for families

4

Collaborate with the school

5

Help families monitor student progress

6

Educate families of existing services and resources



2

Common Barriers Newcomers Face During the IEP Process

Challenges in Collaborating

with Public School Districts



Limited knowledge and understanding of refugee experience

Resource constraints

Bureaucratic hurdles



Data inaccessibility

Language barriers

Cultural differences



Students

Barriers in the IEP Process

- Limited culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments
- Difficulty distinguishing disability-related challenges from other factors
- Educational gaps in the student's background



Families

Barriers in the IEP Process

Families may:

- Consider eligibility for special education as unfavorable
- Lack awareness of support options available to their child
- Find it challenging to share their perspectives and goals during IEP team meetings due to language or cultural barriers
- Need effective translation that is not readily available to the school district



Implementation

Barriers in the IEP Process

- **Discontinuity of services** for highly mobile students
- Challenges ensuring regular **two-way communication**
- Difficulty with ongoing **progress updates**



Families have rights!

If families disagree with the contents of an IEP they can request a meeting, mediation, and due process hearing.

Strengthen Family Engagement

in the IEP Process

- Improved student outcomes
- Enhanced communication
- Shared decision-making
- Increased student motivation





3

Practical Strategies to Destigmatize the IEP Process

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What are some reasons families may not want to participate in the special education process?

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Culturally Responsive, Trauma-Informed Practices

to De-Stigmatize Special Education

1

Acknowledge and respect cultural beliefs about disability and/or education

2

Avoid jargon; clearly explain unfamiliar terms

3

Required to provide professional interpreters and translation

4

Connect families with community and cultural brokers in special education

5

Build trust and rapport with newcomer families

6

Strengthen family engagement initiatives

Family Engagement Tools and Strategies



Using a Strengths-Based Approach



Lean on protective factors

Elevate caregiver voice

Increase predictability



Emphasize students' assets

Leverage IEP as a tool

Approach with a growth mindset

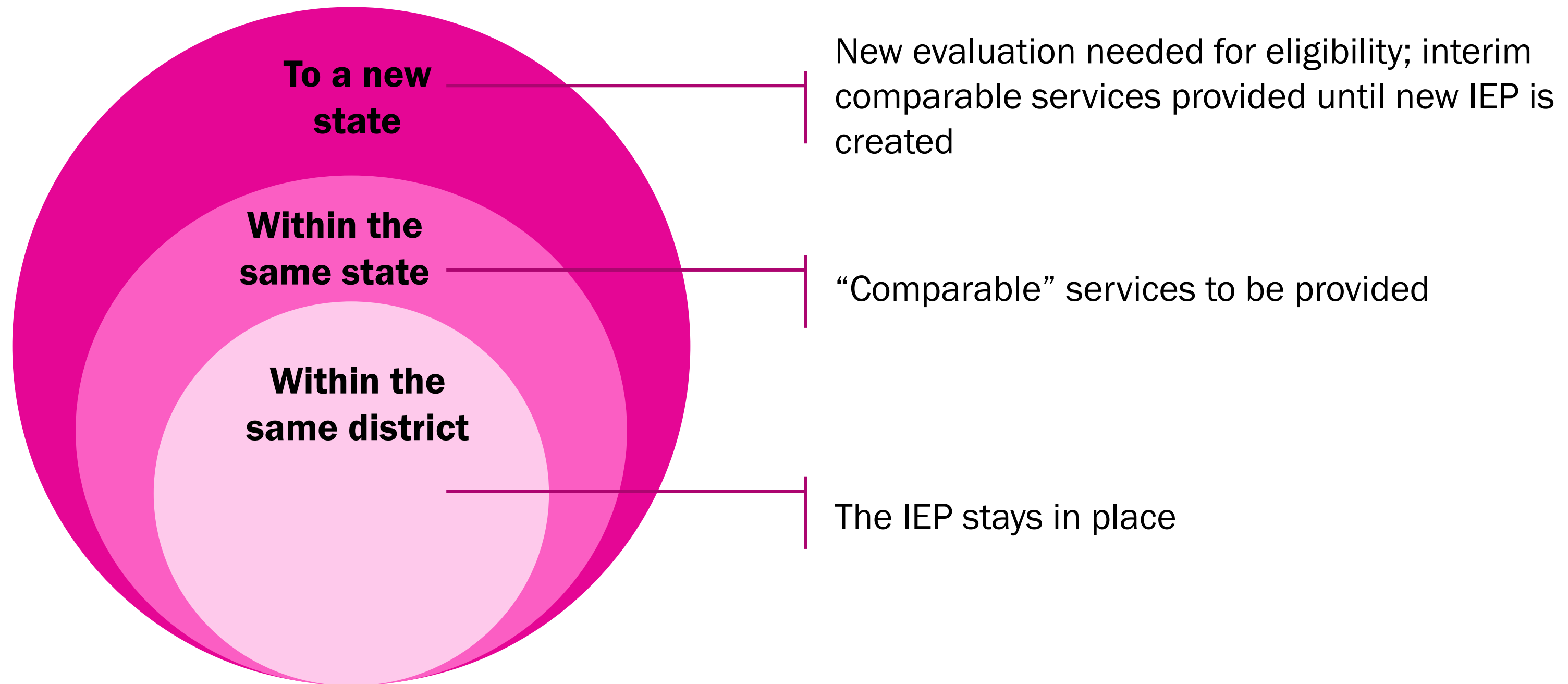


Parents and legal guardians have the right to:

- Attend all meetings.
- Understand all procedural safeguards.
- Request a meeting at any point in the process.
- Understand everything communicated during the IEP process.
- Obtain an independent educational evaluation (IEE).
- Examine all educational records.



Legal protections if a student moves...





If a student is not eligible

for Special Education...

- The school district must provide written notice of ineligibility.
- The written notice must include appeal process details.
- Families can request a 504 plan with medical documentation.
- Newcomer families should consult district experts on 504 plans.

Supporting Students

Not Eligible for Special Education



Case Scenario: Amina

Samir and Maryam—Syrian refugees recently resettled in Worcester, Massachusetts—have a 5-year-old daughter, Amina. Amina is withdrawn, avoids eye contact, rarely smiles, and struggles with pronouncing words in Arabic. Concerned about her development, Samir and Maryam work with a translator to communicate with the local school during her evaluation.

They request Arabic-language assessments and seek guidance on how they can support Amina's learning at home.

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What can a service provider do to support Samir and Maryam in advocating for Amina?

Case Scenario: Jonga

Jonga is a 16-year-old Unaccompanied Refugee Minor from the Democratic Republic of Congo who spent 12 years in a refugee camp in Kenya. After arriving in the U.S. seven months ago, he was placed with an American family and enrolled as a freshman in high school, despite his last known education being at the fifth-grade level.

Jonga is struggling with reading comprehension, math, and understanding instructions in school. His host family has raised concerns with their case worker, suspecting he might have an undiagnosed learning disability.

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What might be a good initial step for addressing Jonga's educational needs, considering his background and the challenges he is currently facing?



Questions?

Type your question in the **Q&A**

Click **thumbs-up**  to vote for others' questions

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Help us help you!

Scan the QR code or click the link in the chat to access our feedback survey!

- Five questions
- 60 seconds
- Help us improve future training and technical assistance.





Recommended Resources

- Blog: [Fostering Resilience for Refugee Students](#)
- Tool: [Supporting Young English Learners at Home: Family and Caregiver Activities](#)
- Evidence Summary: [What Works to Support Newcomers With Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses?](#)
- Evidence Summary: [Determining Special Education Eligibility of English Learners](#)



Fostering Resilience For Refugee Students

June 4, 2024 • Switchboard

By leaning on protective factors, schools can help refugee students navigate traumatic stressors and recognize their unique strengths. In this blog, we will highlight five key protective factors school settings can deploy to support refugee students' academic achievement and well-being.



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