Non-Categorical Early Childhood (NCEC)

It is often difficult to diagnose very young children. With early intervention and appropriate services, children may not need special education by the time they reach first grade. The “Non-Categorical Early Childhood” category allows preschoolers to benefit from special education and related services without being labeled with a specific disability.

It is for students aged 3-5 who have general delays in their physical, cognitive, communication, social, emotional, or adaptive development; and who, because of these delays, need special education and related services. In Texas, a child between the ages of 3-5 may be described as “NCEC” if he or she has been diagnosed as having one of the following:

- Intellectual Delay, NCEC-ID
- Emotional Disturbance, NCEC-ED
- Specific Learning Disability, NCEC-SLD
- Autism, NCEC-AU

A determination of NCEC must comply with criteria set forth in federal and state law as described in the Non-Categorical Early Childhood framework of the Legal Framework for the Child-Center Process. For more information on eligibility, please visit Texas Project First.

In Texas, and many other states, the school district will reassess before the child’s 6th birthday, remove the NCEC label, and determine the updated eligibility/disability. The assessment team will take into consideration the following items:

- educational opportunities and support given to the child since entering school and how he/she has progressed i.e.: Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities, Related services
- current testing data
- parent information including private or outside evaluations the family has gotten for their child

Why does the district reassess?
Assessment can be challenging for a young child because of short attention spans and varied experiences (educational and sociological) when they are initially evaluated at the age of 3.