

FACT SHEET

MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS VS EDUCATIONAL ELIGIBILITY



A medical diagnosis is done in a medical office by a medically licensed professional, while educational eligibility is done in the school environment by the individual's educational team.

1 What is a Medical Diagnosis of Autism?

A medical diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is given by a medical professional. This medical professional may be a pediatrician, licensed child psychologist, neuropsychologist, and/or developmental pediatrician.

The purpose of a medical evaluation is to make a diagnosis of ASD. While there are no medical tests that can determine a diagnosis of autism, the use of medical tests is needed to rule out other causes of the underlying symptoms associated with Autism.

The medical diagnosis criteria are based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5-TR), which provides specific criteria for a diagnosis of ASD:

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
- Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period, even if the symptoms are not noticed until later in childhood

Further screening may be needed to identify any other areas of concern related to the overall development of an individual. From the screening results, you may be referred to a specialist to receive further assessment and observation.

It is important to note that an individual who has a medical diagnosis DOES NOT automatically qualify for special education, however, they may still qualify for other special education supports and services such as speech and language therapy or occupational therapy. These needs will be determined by the school's special education team.

	Medical Diagnosis	Educational Eligibility
Who	Medical professional(s): developmental pediatrician, neurologist, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.	Special Education Team: parent, teacher, school psychologist, speech therapist, etc.
Where	Doctor's office or clinic	Public-School Setting
What	Therapeutic and Medical Interventions	Academic and Functional Skills

The main difference between educational eligibility and a medical diagnosis is the impact on student learning!



2 Educational Eligibility

Educational eligibility is decided by a team of various school professionals and the student's parents/guardians. For a student to receive an eligibility determination by the school, the team must find that the student's needs "adversely affect a child's educational performance". This means the symptoms associated with the ASD determination impact all aspects of learning in general education, including the individual's functioning at school. To be eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the student must have one or more of the IDEA specified disabilities AND need special services (see reverse side). If this criterion is met, the student would qualify for special education and related services under the IDEA.

The team conducts assessments, interviews, and observations to determine an individual's need for special education and related services. Once completed the team will convene to create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP will outline the individual educational supports and needs and serve as a legally binding guideline that the educational team will use to plan and prepare the student's education. A parent/guardian or the individual can request a meeting to review the IEP with the educational team at any time.

Educational Eligibility Areas Identified by IDEA and Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE):

- Autism
- Deaf-Blindness
- Deafness
- Developmental Delay
- Emotional Disability
- Hearing Impairments
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment

Screening Tools:

- Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ)
- Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales (CSBS)
- Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS)
- Screening Tools for Autism in Toddlers and Young Children (STAT)
- Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS)

Diagnostic Tools:

- Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R)
- Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, Second Edition (ADOS-2)



6 considerations of autism spectrum disorder when creating an individualized education plan (IEP)

1. The verbal and nonverbal communication needs of the child
2. The need to develop social interactions skills and proficiency
3. The needs resulting from the student's unusual responses to sensory experience
4. The needs resulting from resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines
5. The needs resulting from engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements
6. The need for any positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address any behavioral difficulties resulting from autism spectrum disorder

The verbal and nonverbal communication needs of the child-

What is the student's current level of communication? What system is the most effective for the student and how does the student use and understand non-verbal communication?

The need to develop social interactions skills and proficiencies-

Describe the student's ability to respond appropriately to the social approach of others, pragmatic skills, and the need for support in developing different types of social interactions that the student is capable of initiating

The needs resulting from the student's unusual responses to sensory experience -

Describe how the student responds and lists any support the student requires in regards to sensory processing

The needs resulting from resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines-

Does the student display unusual or intense responses to changes in the environment or changes in routine?

The needs resulting from engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements-

Does the student engage in ritualistic behaviors, intense interests, and/or repetitive phrases? Describe positive behavior support systems to modify behavior.

The need for any positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address any behavioral difficulties resulting from autism spectrum disorder-

Include positive behavior interventions, strategies and supports are in place to encourage positive behavior. Describe the need for a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) if needed and describe replacement behaviors to teach.

Other needs resulting from the child's disability that impact progress in the general curriculum, including social and emotional development-

Does the student require direct instruction, consistent review of classroom and individual expectations, or repeated practice to generalize skills in new situations with new people?

Additional Information:

ISBE Quick Reference Chart-A Parent Guide on understanding Educational Rights and Responsibilities:

<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Parent-Guide-Special-Ed-Aug20.pdf>

Defines each disability area- <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Special-Education-Disability-Areas.aspx>

Special Education- ISBE Information for parents-

<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Special-Education-Parents-of-Students-with-Disabilities.aspx>

Resources:

<https://dsm.psychiatryonline.org/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html>

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.8>