

SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY Q & A

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WHAT IS A CASE STUDY EVALUATION?

A case study evaluation encompasses a series of in-depth multidisciplinary diagnostic procedures conducted within an established time frame and designed to provide information about your child and the nature of the problems that may affect his/her educational development. These components may include the following:

1. Psychological testing, including analysis of intelligence, achievement, social/emotional status and personality functioning
2. Classroom observations and teacher's report on academic progress
3. Social/Developmental History
4. Therapeutic Summary
5. Vision/Hearing screening and other reviews of relevant health history
6. Psychiatric Evaluation, if needed
7. Substance use screening and/or evaluation, if needed
8. Occupational therapy evaluation, if needed
9. Speech & language evaluation, if needed
10. Assessment of communication skills and motor abilities, if needed

The nature and intensity of each component to be included will vary depending on the needs of your child and the type of existing information available. Upon completion of your child's case study evaluation, a staffing will be scheduled with you, representatives from the school, and any other relevant professionals to discuss the findings and determine eligibility for special education and related services.

HOW DOES A CHILD BECOME ELIGIBLE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION?

Based on the results of the case study evaluation, there are several official categories under which a child may be found eligible for special education and related services support. These include, but are not limited to:

- Emotional and/or Behavioral Disability (ED)
- Other Health Impairment (OHI)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Speech & Language Impairment (SLI)
- Cognitive Disability (CD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Some of the more common eligibility categories and qualifications, are listed below:

Emotional Disability (ED)

A diagnosis of emotional disability means that the child exhibits one or more of the following characteristics to a marked degree and over an extended period of time:

1. Difficulties in learning that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health impairments
2. Problems relating to children and adults
3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances
4. A general mood of unhappiness and depression
5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or fears associated with personal or social problems

There should be evidence that the child's behavior is not the result of a temporary reaction to home, school or community situations.

Other Health Impaired (OHI)

Your child may be found eligible under this category if there is a medically diagnosed physical or physiological condition, including but not limited to, a seizure disorder, asthma, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or diabetes; which may create challenges to educational success. It must be determined that the disability interferes with your child's ability to function at school using the traditional instructional materials and techniques.

A child with a diagnosis of ADD or ADHD is not automatically eligible for special education services. If your child diagnosed with ADD or ADHD meets the requirement(s) under OHI or one of the other disability categories, he/she may be eligible for special education and related services. A special conference would be necessary to determine your child's specific disability. Students with ADD or ADHD who do not meet the eligibility criteria of any of the specified disabilities may be entitled to the services and legal protections described in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 was the first federal Civil Rights Law to protect the rights of people with disabilities. It prohibits discrimination in:

1. The education of students with disabilities
2. Vocational education programs
3. College programs and other post-secondary education programs
4. Employment
5. Health, welfare, and other social service programs
6. Other programs and activities that receive federal funds.

Section 504 requires an evaluation to determine whether or not your child meets the eligibility criteria. If found eligible, the school district is required to provide an appropriate education. This may mean modifying the regular education program and providing any necessary supportive services (e.g., reducing the amount of required work, completing fewer assignments in a shorter period of time, providing more visual instruction, and/or developing behavioral interventions).

Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

A child with a learning disability may have a disorder in one or more of the processes needed to receive, understand or express information. As a result, the child may have difficulty in one or more of the following:

1. Basic reading skills
2. Reading comprehension
3. Written expression
4. Math calculation
5. Listening comprehension
6. Oral expression

Children with learning disabilities show a significant difference between their measured abilities and achievement. The learning disability, then, is not primarily due to a physical, mental, or emotional disability, nor to environmental, cultural, or economic factors.

WHAT IS AN IEP?

The individualized education program (IEP) is a written document describing how special education and related services will be provided for eligible students. The IEP describes your child and what the school will do to give your child the extra support and attention needed. Since parents are part of the team that helps to write IEPs for their children, it is important that you know what they consist of.

Your child's IEP must include the following elements:

1. Present level of educational performance
2. Annual Goals
3. Progress toward annual goals and how parent(s) will be informed of progress

4. Specific special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, and a statement of program modifications or supports for school personnel
5. Beginning date, amount, frequency, location and anticipated duration of services and modifications
6. Extent of participation in regular education programs
7. Language(s) or mode(s) of communication
8. Participation in assessments
9. Placement
10. Extended school year services

HOW IS AN IEP DEVELOPED?

The IEP is created at an IEP meeting, or “staffing”. Participants at this meeting typically include:

1. Parents/Guardians
2. The Student
3. Regular education teacher or special education teacher, depending on the student’s background
4. A representative of the local school district
5. An individual who can interpret the results of any psychological testing/evaluation if needed
6. A representative of any other agency that may be responsible for providing supportive services
7. Any other professionals invited at your discretion
8. Representatives from possible placement options

During the staffing, the team discusses the student’s current levels of academic and behavioral performance. Specific strengths and challenge areas are identified. If your child is over the age of 14, a transition plan is discussed, exploring goals for after high school graduation. Primary therapeutic and academic goals are written, to serve as a framework for guiding instructional and support services through the next year. These goals are monitored and evaluated at predetermined intervals to ensure that progress towards these goals is achieved.

Related service areas that will help support achievement of yearly goals, such as individual, group, and family therapy, psychiatric consultation, and vocational assessments are identified. Specific accommodations or modifications in presentation of academic tasks are outlined, to ensure that your child receives an equal opportunity to complete all necessary requirements. Finally, the team discusses what would be the most appropriate, and least restrictive, environment in which these services and goals can be facilitated.

WHAT ARE EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT OPTIONS?

Your child must be provided an education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This means that to the greatest degree appropriate, any student with a disability aged 3 through 21, in public or private institutions or other care facilities, is educated with children who are not disabled. Any separation of a student from the regular education environment (e.g., special classes, separate schooling) should take place only if the student's IEP team determines that the nature and/or severity of the student's disability is such that education in a regular classroom setting, even with the use of supplemental aids and services, cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Federal regulations require that the IEP team's first placement consideration should be a regular education setting with accommodations or modifications. However, this may not always be the most appropriate setting for your child.

Educational placement decisions are based on your child's needs and may include the following locations. (Please note this is not an exhaustive list):

- **Regular Education** – your child receives specially designed instruction with supplementary aids and services in the general education classroom.
- **Regular Education with Social Work Support** – your child receives additional support from a social worker/counselor within the school setting for therapy sessions.
- **Resource Room (Special Class)** – your child receives specially designed instruction through a special education class, while staying included in regular classes as much as possible.
- **Self-Contained Room (Special Class)** – your child receives specially designed instruction in a special education class, while remaining in those parts of regular education classes, with support, where appropriate.
- **Alternative Educational Setting** – your child receives specially designed instruction in a special school. These can be either public or private therapeutic day schools.
- **Residential Programs** – your child receives specially designed instruction in a special school and lives on the grounds of that same school.