



# Autism Evaluation Guidance

Tennessee Department of Education | August 2017

# Table of Contents

Introduction

Section I: Definition

Section II: Pre-referral and Referral Considerations

Section III: Comprehensive Evaluation

Section IV: Eligibility Considerations

Section V: Re-evaluation Considerations

Appendix A: TN Assessment Instrument Selection Form

Appendix B: Assessments

Appendix C: Resources and Links

Appendix D: Sample Release of Information

Appendix E: Medical Information

Appendix F: Assessment Documentation Form

### ***Components of Evaluation Report:***

The following are recommended components of an evaluation. The outline is not meant to be exhaustive, but serves as an example guide to use when writing evaluation results.

- Reason for referral
- Current/presenting concerns
- Previous evaluations, findings, recommendations (e.g., school-based and outside providers)
- School history (e.g., attendance, grades, statewide achievement, disciplinary/conduct info, behavior intervention plan (BIP))
- Relevant developmental and background history
- Assessment instruments/procedures (e.g., test names; dates of evaluations, observations, and interviews; consultations with specialists)
- Medical information (e.g., diagnoses, prognoses, past/current medication, past/current treatment approaches, healthcare procedures, activity restrictions)
- Current assessment and results
  - Parent interview
  - Observations
  - Autism-specific assessment
  - Rating scales
  - Pragmatic/language assessment
  - Cognitive/developmental assessment
  - Academic skills
- Tennessee disability definition of autism
- Educational impact statement: Review of factors impacting educational performance such as attendance, classroom engagement, study skills, education history
- Summary
- Recommendations

## **Section IV: Eligibility Considerations**

After completion of the evaluation, the IEP team must meet to review results and determine if the student is eligible for special education services. Eligibility decisions for special education services is two-pronged: (1) the team decides whether the evaluation results indicate the presence of a disability **and** (2) the team decides whether the identified disability adversely impacts the student's educational performance such that s/he requires the most intensive intervention (i.e., special education and related services). The parent is provided a copy of the written evaluation report completed by assessment specialists (e.g., psychoeducational evaluation, speech and language evaluation report, occupational and/or physical therapist report, vision specialist report, etc.). After the team determines eligibility, the parent is provided a copy of the eligibility report and a prior written notice documenting the team's decision(s). If

the student is found eligible as a student with an educational disability, an IEP is developed within thirty (30) calendar days.

Evaluation results enable the team to answer the following questions for eligibility:

- **Are both prongs of eligibility met?**
  - **Prong 1:** Do the evaluation results support the presence of an educational disability?
    - The team should consider educational disability definitions and criteria referenced in the disability standards (i.e., evaluation procedures).
    - Are there any other factors that may have influenced the student's performance in the evaluation? A student is not eligible for special education services if it is found that the determinant factor for eligibility is either lack of instruction in reading or math, or limited English proficiency.
  - **Prong 2:** Is there documentation of how the disability adversely affects the student's educational performance in his/her learning environment?
    - Does the student demonstrate a need for specialized instruction and related services?
- Was the eligibility determination made by an IEP team upon a review of **all** components of the assessment?
- If there is more than one disability present, what is the **most impacting** disability that should be listed as the primary disability?

### ***Specific Considerations Related to Autism***

In many cases, autism will be the primary disability as it may affect a student's educational progress in all settings. It is incumbent upon each IEP evaluation team to determine the identification standard that best describes each student's educational disability. In most cases, students who meet the autism standard will be identified under the primary disability of autism. However, students with autism may also meet other disability standards. In some cases, autism may be mildly impacting a student's educational performance while the student's other disability is significantly impacting their performance. For example, if a student with autism who has been found to also have a co-occurring specific learning disability in reading fluency, and the reading disability is the dominant reason the student is demonstrating difficulties in the educational environment, that student may be identified primarily under specific learning disability. In such a case, the student's autism-related behaviors would not be listed/identified as the primary reason for identification, but could still be considered as a secondary disability. Identification of the primary disability (and secondary disability) is the IEP team's decision. It is not necessary to identify a language impairment as disability in order to receive speech or language services as a related service since communication deficits are a feature of autism.

Cultural considerations should be made for students from non-majority families. The professional team must be aware of and sensitive to the social communication norms of the student's culture/family and how these can impact identification of autism.

## Section V: Re-evaluation Considerations

A re-evaluation must be conducted **at least every three years** or earlier if conditions warrant. Re-evaluations may be requested by any member of the IEP team prior to the triennial due date (e.g., when teams suspect a new disability or when considering a change in eligibility for services). This process involves a review of previous assessments, current academic performance, and input from a student's parents, teachers, and related service providers which is to be documented on the Re-evaluation Summary Report (RSR). The documented previous assessments should include any assessment results obtained as part of a comprehensive evaluation for eligibility or any other partial evaluation. Teams will review the RSR during an IEP meeting before deciding on and obtaining consent for re-evaluation needs. Therefore, it is advisable for the IEP team to meet at least 60 calendar days prior to the re-evaluation due date. Depending on the child's needs and progress, re-evaluation may not require the administration of tests or other formal measures; however, the IEP team must thoroughly review all relevant data when determining each child's evaluation need.

Some of the reasons for requesting early re-evaluations may include:

- concerns, such as lack of progress in the special education program;
- acquisition by an IEP team member of new information or data;
- review and discussion of the student's continuing need for special education (i.e., goals and objectives have been met and the IEP team is considering the student's exit from his/her special education program); or
- new or additional suspected disabilities (i.e., significant health changes, outside evaluation data, changes in performance leading to additional concerns).

The IEP team may decide an evaluation is needed or not needed in order to determine continued eligibility. All components of The RSR must be reviewed prior to determining the most appropriate decision for re-evaluation. Reasons related to evaluating or not evaluating are listed below.

### **NO evaluation is needed:**

- The team determines no additional data and/or assessment is needed. The IEP team decides that the student will continue to be eligible for special education services with his/her currently identified disability/disabilities.

- The team determines no additional data and/or assessment is needed. The IEP team decides that the student will continue to be eligible for special education services in his/her **primary** disability; however, the IEP team determines that the student is no longer identified with his/her secondary disability.
- The team determines no additional data and/or assessment is needed. The student is no longer eligible for special education services.
- (Out of state transfers): The team determines additional data and/or assessment is needed when a student transferred from out of state, because all eligibility requirements did NOT meet current Tennessee state eligibility standards. Therefore, the IEP team decides that the student would be eligible for special education services in Tennessee with their previously out-of-state identified disability/disabilities while a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for Tennessee services is conducted.

**Evaluation is needed:**

- The team determines no additional data and/or assessment is needed for the student's **primary** disability. The IEP team decides that the student will continue to be eligible for special education services in his/her **primary** disability; however, the IEP team determines that the student may have an additional disability; therefore, an evaluation needs to be completed in the suspected disability classification area to determine if the student has a secondary and/or additional disability classification. In this case, the student continues to be eligible for special education services with the currently identified primary disability based on the date of the decision. The eligibility should be updated after the completion of the secondary disability evaluation if the team agrees a secondary disability is present (this should not change the primary disability eligibility date).
- The team determines additional data and/or assessment is needed for program planning purposes only. This is a limited evaluation that is specific to address and gather information for goals or services. This evaluation does not include all assessment components utilized when determining an eligibility NOR can an eligibility be determined from information gathered during program planning. If a change in primary eligibility needs to be considered, a comprehensive evaluation should be conducted.
- The team determines an additional evaluation is needed to determine if this student continues to be eligible for special education services with the currently identified disabilities. A comprehensive is necessary anytime a team is considering a change in the primary disability. Eligibility is not determined until the completion of the evaluation; this would be considered a comprehensive evaluation and all assessment requirements for the eligibility classification in consideration must be assessed.

When a student's eligibility is changed following an evaluation, the student's IEP should be reviewed and updated appropriately.

### ***Specific Considerations Related to Autism***

As students age, social demands will change. In addition, the types of academic demands increase in complexity as students get older, moving from concrete skills to more abstract skills. As students enter the higher grades, consideration of increased abstract reasoning skills may need to be assessed and considered when updating programming for students. Therefore, the IEP team should consider whether a secondary disability is present or additional assessments are needed for program planning when reviewing re-evaluation needs for students with autism.

