

AUTISM GUIDELINES

Federal Definition of Autism:

As defined by IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) CFR.300.7

(c)(1)(i): Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movement, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

- **The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance.**

Eligibility:

The team shall determine that a student is eligible for special education services in the area of autism if the student demonstrates a total of six (or more) features from categories #1, #2, and #3, with two from category #1 and at least one or more from each categories #2 and #3, totaling six overall features.

A clinical diagnosis alone is not sufficient to establish eligibility for special education in the area of autism. Bismarck Public Schools endorses best practice of having a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder from a qualified medical or mental health professional. Thus, it is important for the evaluation team to have this information to make the correct decisions regarding the evaluation and programming.

An educational evaluation must address the features from all three categories and must document evidence that the student demonstrates behaviors that are atypical for the student's developmental level. At least two different assessment tools must be used and may include: structured interviews with parents/teachers, observations, autism checklists/behavior rating scales, communication and developmental rating scales, functional behavior assessments, application of diagnostic criteria from the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V), informal and standardized assessment instruments, or cognitive testing. In addition, the multidisciplinary team must determine that the child's educational performance is adversely affected.

Criteria:

DIAGNOSIS: Autism has been diagnosed and documented by a qualified professional based on the current DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL (DSM-V) (required by BPS); AND

Category #1 Features

ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE: The student displays extreme difficulties in social relationships. *(Two or more behavioral indicators required.)*

- Limited joint attention and limited use of facial expression as directed toward others
- Does not show or bring things to others to indicate an interest in an activity
- Demonstrates difficulties in relating to people, objects, and events (peers)
- A gross impairment in ability to make and keep friends
- Shows significant vulnerability and safety issues due to social naiveté
- Appears to prefer isolated or solitary activities
- Misinterprets others' behaviors and social cues
- Demonstrates gross impairments of solitary, imaginative, cooperative, and reciprocal play; AND

Category #2 Features

DISTURBANCE OF COMMUNICATION: The student displays a qualitative impairment in communication. *(One or more behavioral indicators required.)*

- Has an absence, loss, or delay of spoken language

- Includes echolalia, mechanical, or stilted speech
- Has little response to language
- Exhibits pronoun reversals
- Demonstrates difficulty with expressing emotions
- Has impairment in the use/interpretation of nonverbal communication, facial expression, or gestures
- Uses language in an unconventional way
- Uses odd production of speech including intonation, volume, rhythm, or rate
- Uses repetitive or idiosyncratic language or has inability to initiate or maintain a conversation when speech is present (with peers); AND

CATEGORY #3 Features

ATYPICAL RANGE OF INTERESTS, PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR, INTEREST AND/OR RESPONSES TO SENSORY STIMULI: The student displays a narrow encompassing preoccupation with objects, sensations, rituals, or routines. (*One or more behavioral indicators required.*)

- Exhibits atypical, stereotypical, or repetitive responses demonstrating distress or resistance to changes in activity
- Demonstrates overreaction or under-reaction to sensory stimuli (which may include sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch, balance, body awareness, and pain)
- Uses rigid or rule-bound thinking such as an intense, focused preoccupation with a limited range of play, interests, or conversation topics
- Shows a lack of true imaginative play versus reenactment
- Has difficulty generalizing skills from one setting to another
- Insists on following routines or rituals, which may be complex
- Demonstrates repetitive thinking and actions and is preoccupied with certain sounds, words, phrases, ideas, or items
- Has excellent memory for visual detail, facts, or rote lists
- Focuses on small details and demonstrates little awareness of critical elements of information

Six overall features MUST be met for eligibility; two from Category 1 and at least 1 from Categories 2 and 3; and the remaining two may come from any of the Categories.

Educational Impact:

The impact of the disability requires **specialized instruction** as it has an **adverse impact** on educational performance and is **not** able to be provided by general education.