AUTISM GUIDELINES

Federal Definition of Autism:
As defined by IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) CFR.300.8 (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 movements, 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.

A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age three could be identified as having autism if the criteria in paragraph (c)(1)(i) of this section are satisfied.

Eligibility:
The student must meet the criteria listed below (A-C) to be eligible for special education services due to Autism:
The child:
A. has been evaluated by licensed clinical or school-based professionals, using an **autism-specific comprehensive evaluation**, and must be found to be functioning in the range of autistic spectrum disorders based on the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM- 5-TR).
B. demonstrates a disability that adversely affects educational performance as evidenced by performance, skills, and data that fall significantly below average in all of the following areas: verbal social communication, nonverbal social communication, and social interaction (at least one of the items from each category listed under 'Criteria').
C. exhibits significant deficits in the social or academic area compared to same age peers, despite the provision of general education accommodations, supports, and intervention to remediate skills.

A clinical diagnosis alone is not sufficient to establish eligibility for special education in the area of autism. Bismarck Public Schools endorses the best practice of the child being evaluated by qualified clinical or school-based professionals, using an **autism-specific comprehensive evaluation**, and must be found to be functioning in the range of autism spectrum disorders based on the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM- 5-TR).

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. A comprehensive evaluation must be completed 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- 5-

TR), and informal and standardized assessment instruments. In addition, the multidisciplinary team must determine that the child's educational performance is adversely affected.

Criteria:
Need to meet one criteria in Verbal Social Communication Area: persistent and significant deficits in verbal social communications across contexts

- The child exhibits a lack of social-emotional reciprocity; (e.g.back-and-forth conversation, a reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; a failure to initiate or respond to social interactions, or significant resistance to joining group activities)
- The child exhibits difficulties with: developing, maintaining, and/or understanding relationships: (adjusting behavior to suit social contexts, sharing, imaginative play, making friends; interacting with peers, or appearing lonely, isolated, and withdrawn).

Need to meet one criteria in Nonverbal Social Communication Area: persistent and significant deficits in non-verbal social communication behaviors across contexts

- The child exhibits difficulties with: developing, maintaining, and/or understanding relationships: (adjusting behavior to suit social contexts, sharing, imaginative play, making friends; interacting with peers, or appearing lonely, isolated, and withdrawn).
- The child exhibits hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sensory input; or, an unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment: (e.g., indifference to pain/temperature, strong reaction to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement, addition of proprioceptive, balance, body awareness).

Need to meet one criteria in Social Interaction Area: persistent and significant restricted patterns of behavior, interests, or activities limit social interactions

- The child exhibits: stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech: (e.g., hand flapping or toe-walking, lining up of toys or flipping objects, atypical speech production- echolalia, stilted/mechanical speech).
- The child exhibits: resistance to change, following/an adherence to inflexible and/or nonfunctional routines; or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal social interactions/behavior: (e.g., extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, greeting rituals, must take same route or eat same food every day).
- The child exhibits intense, very restricted, or fixated interests: (e.g., strong attachment /preoccupation with unusual objects, perseverates on topics or interests).

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.