

# Clinical Diagnoses and Educational Disability Identification



**Students who have a clinical or medical diagnosis of a disability may also be eligible for special education services.<sup>†</sup> However, a diagnosis does not automatically qualify a child for special education eligibility. School-based evaluation teams must determine whether the diagnosed disability adversely impacts educational performance to such a degree that special education is needed.**

When determining whether a child is eligible for special education and related services, school-based teams, such as multidisciplinary evaluation teams (MDET) and eligibility committees (EC), must consider multiple sources of information consistent with the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 \(IDEA\)](#) and [WVBE Policy 2419: Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities](#). A clinical or medical diagnosis may serve as one such source of information in this decision-making process.

## Clinical or Medical Diagnoses and Educational Disability Identification: A Comparison

	Clinical or Medical Diagnoses	Educational Disability Identification
<b>Who Determines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» A practitioner from outside a school system, such as a physician, clinical or child psychologist, neuropsychologist, speech-language pathologist, or another qualified clinical professional.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» A school-based eligibility committee, usually consisting of an educational administrator, general and/or special educators, members of the MDET who conduct diagnostic assessments.</li> </ul>
<b>How They Are Determined</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Clinical professionals may make diagnoses using criteria in the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)</i>.</li> <li>» Disorders do not necessarily have to interfere with educational performance for a clinician to diagnose them.</li> <li>» Symptoms related to the diagnosis may not always manifest in the school setting.</li> <li>» There is no reevaluation requirement to maintain a clinical or medical diagnosis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Educational disabilities are identified in WV schools based on eligibility criteria in WVBE Policy 2419.</li> <li>» The student must experience an adverse effect on educational performance, which includes both academic (e.g., reading, math, communication) and non-academic (e.g., mobility, self-help skills, vocational skills) areas.</li> <li>» The student must “need special education” to promote access to the general curriculum.</li> <li>» Students with disabilities must be reevaluated at least every three years to determine continued eligibility and identify strengths and weaknesses.</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» To understand symptoms and inform treatment.</li> <li>» May serve as an additional source of information for schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» To serve as a basis for proving special education and related services.</li> </ul>
<b>What Evaluation Might Involve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» The evaluation process may vary widely from professional to professional, or practice to practice.</li> <li>» Some diagnostic evaluations may involve as much as what is listed to the right for a school-based evaluation, while other clinicians may base a diagnosis solely on an interview with a parent or guardian-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» School-based evaluations are required by law to be sufficiently comprehensive to identify all the student’s potential special education and related service needs.</li> <li>» Evaluation components may include, but are not limited to developmental history; vision / hearing / motor assessment; parent interviews/reports; teacher interviews/reports; student interview(s); review of educational records; review of the student’s response to academic or behavioral intervention; standardized assessment of achievement, speech/language, social/emotional/behavioral functioning, and/or intelligence; vocational evaluation; and classroom observations.</li> </ul>

## Other Considerations

- » Information provided to a student's school, such as an evaluation conducted outside of the school setting or a clinical or medical diagnosis, should be considered within the context of the student's education. However, the school district will likely need to conduct a comprehensive evaluation to determine the need for special education services according to relevant state and federal regulations.
- » Physicians or other clinical professionals may recommend a school-based evaluation for special education or accommodations under Section 504. However, they may not *prescribe* special education, an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or a Section 504 accommodation plan.
- » According to WVBE Policy 2419, school psychologists in West Virginia may diagnose Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to fulfill the criteria requiring diagnoses for the disability categories of **Autism** and **Other Health Impairment**, respectively, specifically when ADHD is the health condition which adversely affects educational performance.
- » School psychologists in West Virginia may include a diagnosis (e.g., Specific Learning Disorder, Intellectual Disability, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) within a psychoeducational evaluation report, but eligibility for special education services is ultimately determined by the EC after a multidisciplinary evaluation is completed.
- » Although there is no reevaluation requirement to maintain a clinical or medical diagnosis, for students whose disability category **requires** a clinical or medical diagnosis (e.g., Autism, Other Health Impairment), data supporting the continued need for special education as a result of the diagnosis may be necessary during a triennial reevaluation.
- » A student with a clinical diagnosis may be eligible for a Section 504 Plan, provided the other necessary criteria are met. [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) protects against discrimination on the basis of a disability in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. For more information, [click here](#) or contact the Section 504 Coordinator of your school or district.

\**Special education services* is defined as specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique educational needs of an eligible student with an exceptionality, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings. The term includes speech-language pathology services, vocational education, and travel training if it consists of specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a student with an exceptionality.

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**Note:** This guidance is meant to provide clarification and reflects the West Virginia Department of Education's interpretation of current state and federal regulations pertaining to special education and individuals with disabilities. This information may be subject to change. Visit <https://wvde.us/> for the latest information, including any updates to this document. This guidance is not legally binding, and should not be construed as legal advice. If seeking legal advice, please contact legal counsel.



West Virginia Department of Education  
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