

## Clinical Diagnosis vs Special Education Eligibility

It is very logical to think that if a child has been diagnosed with a disability by a physician that the child will automatically be eligible for special education services through their local school district. However, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a child meets the criteria of one of the defined disability categories for education and there is evidence that the disability adversely affects their educational performance. ***Therefore, a child must have an educational identification of a disability to be eligible for special education services.***

The primary purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to ensure that all children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), including special education and related services that are “designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living” (Sec.300.1 (a)). IDEA defines 14 educational disability categories and the comprehensive evaluation process required to determine if a child is eligible for special education. This evaluation is free and is completed by a multidisciplinary team through the local school district. ***The purpose of the evaluation is to determine if the child meets the regulatory definition of one or more of the disability categories defined in IDEA and if the disability affects his/her educational performance.*** The evaluation also helps determine the child’s individual educational needs and guides appropriate educational programming for the child. The multidisciplinary team may utilize the results and recommendations provided from a child’s medical or clinical evaluation to help inform the special education evaluation process, interventions, and accommodations.

A medical condition or clinical diagnosis is made by a licensed physician, neurologist, psychiatrist, etc. or other specially trained or certified clinician, and guides treatment services to address medical issues and promote overall wellness. A medical or clinical diagnosis is often required by insurance and/or other providers to determine “medical necessity” for a variety of services such as therapy or medications. Conditions do not have to affect school performance in order for medical professionals to diagnose them, and not all children diagnosed with a disability by a medical professional will meet all the criteria to be eligible for special education. Likewise, local school district multidisciplinary teams cannot diagnose a medical condition or disorder. It is often necessary for a child to receive a medical or clinical evaluation and a special education evaluation in order to receive comprehensive treatment and services in the community, home, and school. A collaborative approach between families, clinical professionals, and school teams can support a child’s developmental, behavioral, social, and academic needs.

Additional information and resources on special education, including the federal definitions of the 14 disability categories under IDEA, can be found on the Ohio Department of Education website [education.ohio.gov](http://education.ohio.gov) or by contacting the OVESC Parent Mentor Program (website [ovesc.org](http://ovesc.org)). Parent mentors provide information, resources and support to families of children with disabilities and their school districts. All services are free through funds from the Ohio Department of Education.

Ohio Valley Educational Service Center (OVESC) Parent Mentor Program  
Cambridge 740-439-3558      Marietta 740-373-6669

