

Criteria for the Identification of Students with Autism

Recognizing the many factors involved in appropriately identifying students with Autism, Middlesex County Public Schools (Office of Special Education), has established criteria to be used by eligibility committees for the purpose of decision-making.

State Definition:

Regulations Governing Special Education Programs For Children With Disabilities in Virginia (2009), define Autism by the following; “a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, 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 this definition are satisfied.”

Assessments:

If the student is suspected of having Autism, then assessments should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Classroom Educational Documentation - Written report from classroom teacher(s) describing the child’s level of academic, developmental, social, or adaptive level of functioning including strengths, weaknesses, and other factors which affect educational performance.
- Psychological – Written report from a qualified school psychologist or other qualified professional based on the use of a battery of appropriate instruments which may assess cognition, emotionality, processing performance, autistic characteristics, adaptive skills, and social skills.
- Educational – (when appropriate) Written report describing current educational performance/achievement and identifying instructional strengths and weaknesses in academic skills and processing performance.
- Developmental (ages 2-5) – (when appropriate) Written report of an assessment of how the child functions in the major areas of physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, and/or adaptive development.
- Speech/Language – Written report of an evaluation which may assess the child’s articulation, voice, fluency, and expressive and receptive language skills.
- Hearing Screening – A written report to assess the child’s hearing.

- Observation – Written report of the child’s academic performance and behavior in the child’s learning environment (including the general education classroom setting) to document the child’s academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty. NOTE: This observation should take place in a class where perceived weaknesses are indicated. *In case of a child less than school age or out of school, a group member shall observe the child in an environment appropriate for a child of that age.

Note: Although a medical diagnosis is not necessary, it would be helpful information for the eligibility committee to consider in the decision making process. A medical diagnosis (disability) may not necessarily equate to an educational disability.

DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR 299.00 AUTISTIC DISORDER

(The following is from *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM IV-TR, 2000*)

- A. A total of six (or more) items from (1), (2), and (3), with at least two from (1), and one each from (2) and (3):
 1. Qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:
 - a. marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction
 - b. failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level
 - c. a lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest)
 - d. lack of social or emotional reciprocity
 2. Qualitative impairments in communication as manifested by at least one of the following:
 - a. delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture or mime)
 - b. in individuals with adequate speech, marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others
 - c. stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language
 - d. lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level

3. Restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, as manifested by at least one of the following:
 - a. encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus
 - b. apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
 - c. stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)
 - d. persistent preoccupation with parts or objects
- B. Delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of the following areas, with onset prior to age 3 years: (1) social interactions, (2) language as used in social communication, or (3) symbolic or imaginative play
- C. The disturbance is not better accounted for by Rett's Disorder or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

Eligibility Criteria:

The following criteria must be met when determining whether a student with autism requires special education services:

1. The child's age falls within 2-21 years of age, inclusive.
2. The student has a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication.
3. The student has a developmental disability that significantly affects social interaction.
4. The student's deficits are not primarily the result of an emotional-behavior disability.
5. The onset is generally evident before age 3.
6. Evaluation information confirms there is an adverse effect on educational performance.
7. The student requires instruction to address identified deficit areas that cannot reasonably be provided solely through regular education.

Comparison of Diagnostic Criteria

Source	Social Interaction	Communication Functioning	Behavior Skills
DSM-IV-TR	Qualitative impairment in social interaction	Qualitative impairment in communication	Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities
IDEA	A developmental disability that significantly affects social interaction	Developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication	Engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual response to sensory experiences