

Special Education Categories of Eligibility

To be eligible for Special Education services, the student must have a disability that adversely affects educational performance and therefore needs special education and related services to benefit from their educational program. The lack of educational achievement cannot be the result of limited school experience, poor school attendance, a history of inappropriate instruction, or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. Schools provide an evaluation at no expense to parents to determine eligibility for special education.

Specific Learning Disability

To determine eligibility, districts now have the option to either use what is known as the “discrepancy” method or the “RTI” method (response to intervention). The discrepancy method requires the finding that there is a severe discrepancy between the child’s intellectual ability and his academic achievement, both of which are measured by standardized tests. The discrepancy must be due to a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations.

The RTI method involves monitoring the student’s response to increasingly intensive levels of general education intervention to determine if specialists should be brought in for a comprehensive evaluation to see if special education is needed. Ask your district if this methodology is an option.

Speech and Language

An articulation disorder in which all of the following exist: reduced intelligibility or inability to use speech which significantly interferes with communication or attracts adverse attention, significant interference in communication when production of single or multiple speech sounds is below age level. Other language disorders include abnormal voice and fluency disorders. A Language disorder (expressive or receptive) in which the student scores at least 1.5 standard deviations below the mean or below 7% for age on two or more standardized tests in one or more of the following: morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics.

Other Health Impairment

Limited strength, vitality or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems, including but not limited to: asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and this condition adversely affects their academic performance.

Severe Emotional Disturbance

One or more of the following conditions are exhibited over an extended period of time and to a marked degree: inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships exhibited with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances exhibited in several situations; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Autism Spectrum/Pervasive Developmental Disorder

Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, which 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.

Mental Retardation (Limited Cognitive Ability)

General intellectual functioning is significantly below average with deficits in adaptive behavior which are manifested during the developmental period.

Hearing Impairment/Deaf

A hearing impairment, whether permanent or fluctuating which impairs the processing of linguistic information through hearing, even with amplification.

Deaf/Blindness

Both hearing and visual impairments exist, the combination of which causes severe communication, developmental and educational problems.

Multiple Disabilities

Combinations of disabilities such as mental retardation and blindness, mental retardation and deafness, mental retardation and orthopedic impairment, (excludes deaf-blindness) to the extent that needs cannot be met in programs that address only one of the impairments.

Orthopedic Impairment

Severe orthopedic impairments adversely affecting educational performance, including those caused by congenital anomaly, disease or other causes (such as cerebral palsy, amputations and fractures or burns which cause contractures).

Traumatic Brain Injury

An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external force or by an internal occurrence such as stroke or aneurysm, resulting in partial or total functional disability or psychosocial maladjustment resulting in mild, moderate or severe impairments in one or more areas, including cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment, problem-solving; sensory, perceptual and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not include congenital, degenerative or brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Visual Impairment

A visual impairment, including blindness, which even with correction adversely affects a child's educational performance. Includes partial sight and blindness.

Additional Eligibility Criteria for Children Birth through 4 years & Nine Months

The child is functioning at or below 50% of her/his chronological age in one of 5 skill areas (gross or fine motor, receptive or expressive language, social or emotional development, cognitive development and visual development) or between the 51% and 75% in any of two areas or the child has a medical condition or congenital syndrome which the IEP team determines has a high predictability of requiring intensive special education and services.

Early Start Services (provided by Regional Centers and Local Education Agencies)

Available to children ages birth through two years of age who meet one of the following criteria: 1) have a developmental delay in one or more of five areas (cognitive development, physical and motor development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development); 2) have an established risk condition with a high probability of developmental delay; or 3) at high risk of substantial developmental delay due to a combination of factors.

Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center

Serving Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties

Empowering families of children with special needs to understand and access the systems that serve them.

www.matrixparents.org

94 Galli Drive, Suite C, Novato, CA 94949

1615 West Texas Street, Suite 4, Fairfield, CA 94533

1 (800) 578-2592