

# Educational Evaluation for Autism

**State Superintendent's  
Conference on Special  
Education & Pupil Services  
Leadership Issues**

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

# Special Education

- Under Wisconsin law, *special education* means specially designed instruction, regardless of where the instruction is conducted, that is provided at no cost to the child or the child's parents, to meet the unique needs of a ***child with a disability***, including instruction in physical education.

# Child with a Disability

- Two-part test to be considered a “child with a disability”
  - First, does the child meet the educational eligibility impairment criteria for one of the disability areas that *adversely affects his/her educational performance*?
  - And, as a result of the disability, does the child need special education and related services?
  - **ANSWER TO BOTH MUST BE “YES”!**

# Eligibility impairment areas

- Cognitive Disabilities (CD)
- Hearing Impairments (HI)
- Speech or Language Impairments (S/L)
- Visual Impairments (VI)
- Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD)
- Orthopedic Impairments (OI)
- **Autism**
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Other Health Impairments (OHI)
- Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)
- Per state law, also includes Significant Developmental Delay...

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# Autism in Wisconsin Schools

- **The numbers of children with autism receiving special education services in Wisconsin based on DPI child count:**
  - 1992-93: 203
  - 2002-03: 3,079
  - 2003-04: 3,669
  - 2005-06: 5085
  - 2006-07: 5635
  - 2007-08: 6217
- Since 2002 – more than doubled.



# Autism in Wisconsin Schools

**What are the reasons for this increase?**

- Better medical identification?
- Better educational identification?
- Corresponding decline in other disability areas?
- A true increase in incidence?
- We don't know...



# Autism in Wisconsin Schools

- Autism spectrum disorders are:
  - Developmental disabilities.
  - Usually evident before age three.
  - Neurological disorders.

# Autism in Wisconsin Schools

- Physical differences in the brains of individuals with autism create
  - Vastly differing neurological experiences;
  - A wide continuum of symptoms;
  - A range in severity;
  - Wide variability among students.

# Medical Diagnosis versus Educational Eligibility Determination

Federal and state special education law use the categorical term autism, which in special education practice may include students with *medical* diagnoses of autism spectrum disorders such as:

- Autism,
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS),
- Asperger's Syndrome.

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# Medical Diagnosis versus Educational Eligibility Determination

- A medical diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder is **not required** to determine whether a student meets eligibility criteria for the educational impairment area of autism.
- If medical information is available it should be *considered* as part of the evaluation but must not be the sole component.
- School personnel **may not** require parents to obtain a medical diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder during the evaluation.

# Medical Diagnosis versus Educational Eligibility Determination

- IEP teams make eligibility determinations for an educational impairment of autism.
- **IEP teams do not make medical diagnoses.**



# Medical Diagnosis versus Educational Eligibility Determination

- A medical diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder does not equal automatic eligibility for special education under the educational impairment area of autism.
- It is also possible for a student to have the educational impairment of autism but not need special education services.

# IEP Team Participants

- All IEP team participants, including parents, must have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in the decision making process.
- Each IEP team must consist of the following:
  - The parents of the child.
  - At least one regular education teacher of the child if the child is, or may be, participating in a regular educational environment.

# IEP Team Participants

- At least one special education teacher who has ***recent training or experience related to the child's known or suspected area of special education needs*** or, where appropriate, at least one special education provider of the child.
  - Autism is not an area of teacher certification/licensing!
  - Who fulfills this role on the IEP team?

# IEP Team Participants

- A representative of the local educational agency (often called LEA Representative)
  - Qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, special education,
  - Is knowledgeable about the general curriculum,
  - Is knowledgeable about and authorized to commit the available resources of the local educational agency.
  - LEA Representative role can be fulfilled by another IEP team participant provided she/he meets the requirement to act in both capacities,

# IEP Team Participants

- An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results (often a school psychologist).
- At the discretion of the parent or the LEA, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise about the child, including related services personnel as appropriate.
  - This determination is made by the party inviting the individual.
- Whenever appropriate, the child.

# IEP Team Participants

- If a child is attending school through open enrollment or a tuition waiver, at least one person designated by the resident district who has knowledge or special expertise about the child.
- When a child is suspected or known to need occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech and language therapy, a therapist in each respective area of service.

# Recommended Autism IEP Team Participants

- **Occupational therapists** assess the effects of the environment and the demands of an activity on the student's ability to perform functional skills, such as the effects of noise or touch on social interaction.
- **Speech and language therapists** conduct assessments of the student's communication abilities and needs.

# Recommended Autism IEP Team Participants

- **Physical therapists** assess the student's motor skills.
- **School nurses** bring expertise to evaluation of complex health needs.

# Recommended Autism IEP Team Participants

- **School psychologists** provide important information about the student's social functioning, neurological functioning, developmental rates and sequences, etc. and are able to interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results.
- **School social workers** provide insight into the student's developmental history and how the student functions and interacts in home, school and community environments.

**Referral**

**Evaluation**

**IEP Team decides:**

- 1. does child have an impairment?**
- 2. does the child need special**

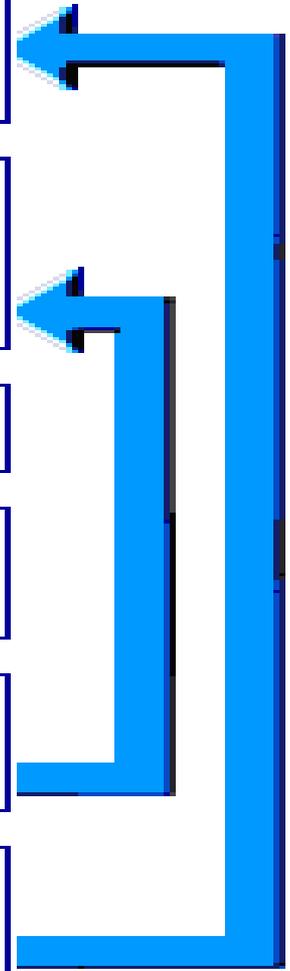
**IEP team writes IEP together. This includes deciding what services the child needs.**

**IEP team decides on placement.**

**LEA implements the IEP and placement.**

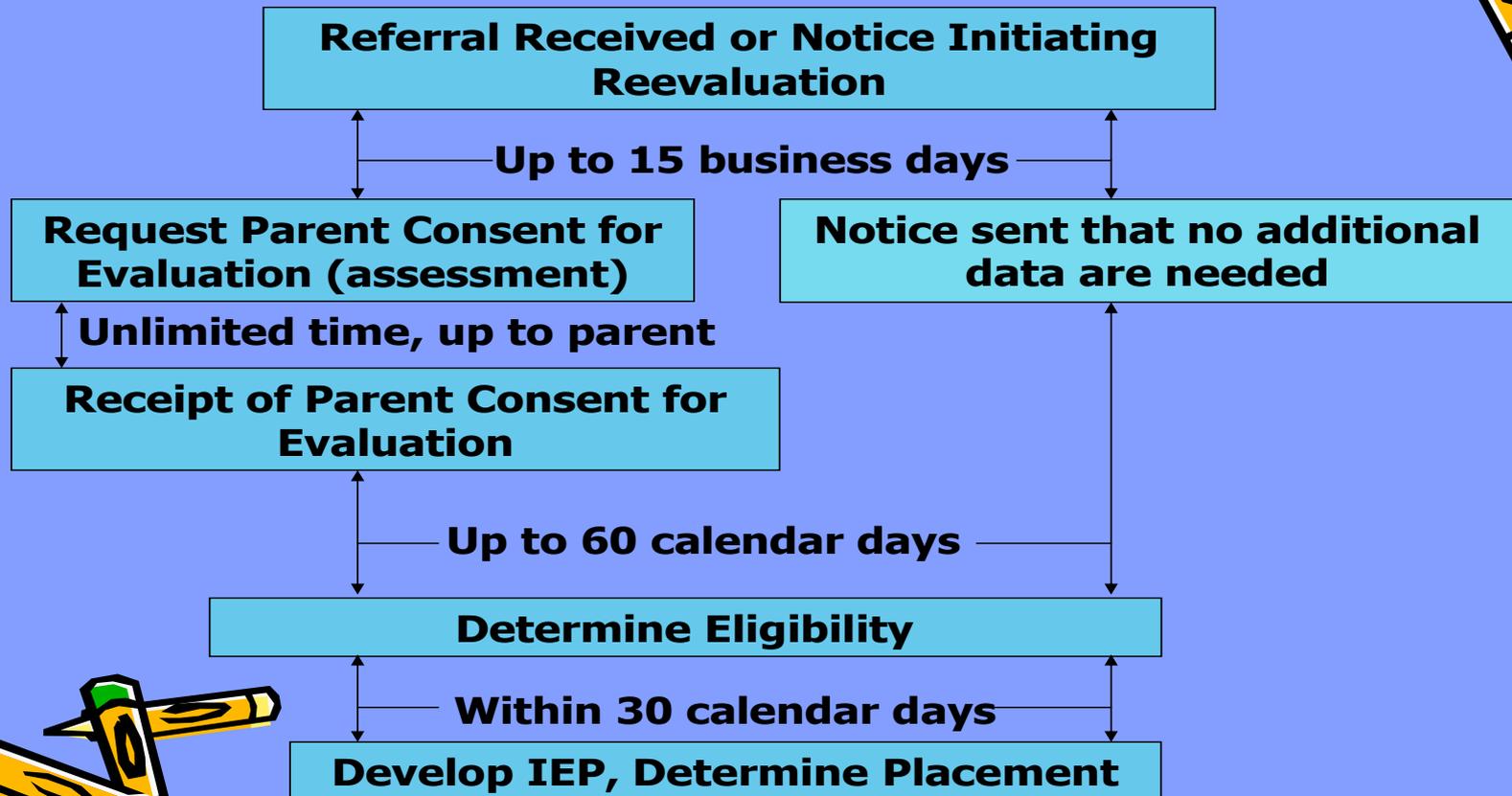
**IEP team reviews the IEP and placement at least annually.**

**IEP team does a reevaluation at least every three years, unless parents and school agree not to.**



# Timelines

## Evaluation / IEP / Placement Timelines



# Review of existing information and data

- Existing data is reviewed by the IEP team members to determine if additional tests or other assessment information is needed.
- If additional assessment information is needed, the LEA obtains parental consent and proceeds.

# Review of existing information and data

- The IEP team must have sufficient information and data to determine:
  - whether the child has a particular category of disability and the educational needs of the child;
  - the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance and related developmental needs of the child;
  - whether the child needs special education and related services;

# Review of existing information and data

- There must be sufficient information and data for the IEP team to determine (cont.)
  - the nature and extent of special education and related services that the child needs;
  - the content of the child's IEP including information related to enabling the child to be involved in and progress in the general education curriculum.

# Autism Eligibility Criteria

- **Wisconsin Eligibility Criteria for Autism: Wisconsin Administrative Code, Chapter PI-11.36 (8)**
- See Eligibility Worksheet

# Autism - Definition

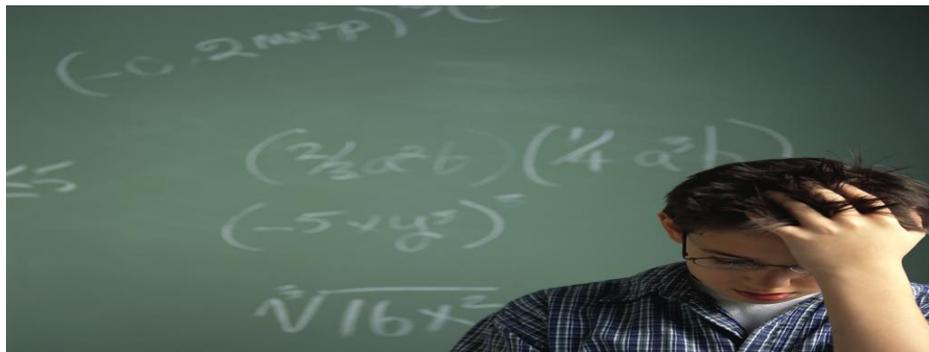
- *AUTISM. (a) Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting a child's social interaction and verbal and non-verbal communication, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects learning and educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement 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, as defined in sub.(7).*

“Adversely affecting learning and educational performance...”

- **Educational performance may include:**
  - Cognitive performance, including academic and pre-academic skills.
  - Communication skills.
  - Personal/Social skills.
  - Sensory processing and motor planning skills.
  - Adaptive skills, including self-help skills and activities of daily living.

# “Adversely affecting learning and educational performance...”

- Impact on educational performance may extend beyond the school environment and the school day.
- Many students with autism appear to function in an expected way at school.
- However, the student may experience significant challenges due to the effort required to manage the communication, social, academic and sensory expectations of a typical school day.

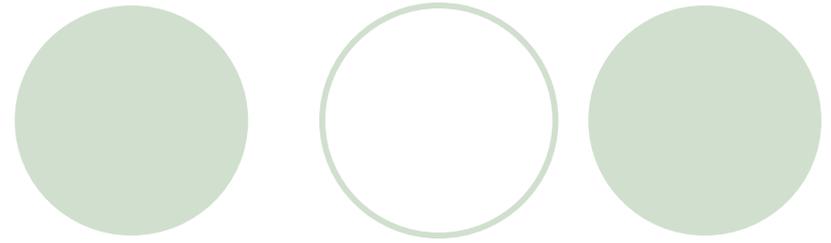


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# Autism and EBD

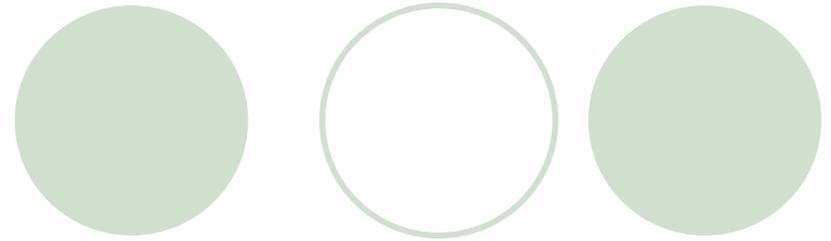
- *The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance, as defined in sub.(7).*
- Students may be identified as meeting educational eligibility criteria in more than one impairment area.
- However, if the issues most significantly impacting educational performance for a particular student relate to an emotional behavioral disability (EBD), the student can not meet the criteria for the educational impairment of autism.

# Autism and EBD



- If the issues most significantly impacting educational performance for a student relate to autism it is possible for that student to also meet the educational eligibility criteria for EBD.

# Autism and EBD



- IEP teams should examine all sources of information and use professional judgment in considering the educational needs of the student and decide which area(s) of impairment or best match the student's needs.
- An evaluation guide for EBD is available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/pdf/ebdguide.pdf>.

# Assessment Methods and Sources

## PI 11.36 (8) (b): EVALUATION PROCEDURES

- *(b) The results of standardized or norm–referenced instruments used to evaluate and identify a child under this paragraph may not be reliable or valid. Therefore, alternative means of evaluation, such as criterion–referenced assessments, achievement assessments, observation, and work samples, shall be considered to identify a child under this paragraph. Augmentative communication strategies, such as facilitated communication, picture boards, or signing shall be considered when evaluating a child under this paragraph. To identify a child under this paragraph, the criteria under subd. 1. and 2. and one or more criteria under subd. 3. through 6. shall be met.*

# Assessment Methods and Sources

- No one assessment method alone is sufficient when determining eligibility for special education.
- IEP teams must gather information from multiple sources and employ a variety of methods.

# Assessment Methods and Sources

- Sources and methods of assessment may include:
  - Observations in a range of environments,
  - Standardized or norm-referenced tests,
  - Intellectual testing,
  - Informal and criterion-referenced tests,
  - Rating scales and checklists,

# Assessment Methods and Sources

- Structured interviews with parents, caregivers, regular education teachers, and others as appropriate,
- Developmental histories,
- For early childhood students, the IEP team must observe the student in the natural learning environment with same-age peers.

# Assessment Methods and Sources

- Not all assessment techniques must be used in all cases, but IEP teams should carefully consider what information is needed and select appropriate methods.
- IEP teams must exercise caution in interpreting scores from standardized assessments, checklists, and rating scales. Scores represent one piece of the assessment picture, and decisions about eligibility must not be made on the basis of these scores alone.

# PI 11.36 (8) (b) 1: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

- *1. The child displays difficulties or differences or both in interacting with people and events. The child may be unable to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships with people. The child may seek consistency in environmental events to the point of exhibiting rigidity in routines.*
- For the child to be eligible, this must be “yes”!

# Social Participation

- Students with autism exhibit differences in the development of social relation skills that typical children develop innately.
- While students with autism may show interest in social interaction and /or affection, they may not be able to initiate or maintain interactions with peers and adults in the expected manner for their developmental age.



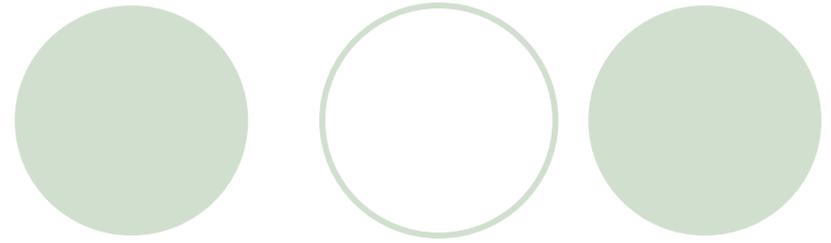
# Social Participation

- Some students with autism may successfully learn the rote aspects of interaction including manners, social niceties and eye gaze.
- Exercise caution in interpreting these rule-based social skills as being an overall indicator of the quality of the student's social abilities.



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# Social Participation



- Social expectations change as students grow and develop.
- As students get older, their social interactions include those outside of the family context.
- Many students with autism prefer the company of, or have better social success with, adults or younger children versus same-age peers. Be cautious in interpreting students social abilities based only on successful interactions with adults, especially in structured situations.

# PI 11.36 (8) (b) 2: COMMUNICATION

- *2. The child displays problems which extend beyond speech and language to other aspects of social communication, both receptively and expressively. The child's verbal language may be absent or, if present, lacks the usual communicative form which may involve deviance or delay or both. The child may have a speech or language disorder or both in addition to communication difficulties associated with autism.*
- For the child to be eligible, this must be “yes”!

# Communication

- Students with autism exhibit a wide range of language and communication abilities, from nonverbal to highly verbal with excellent vocabularies.
- Though some students with autism exhibit appropriate language form skills all students with autism exhibit communication difficulties or differences in language use.
- Both receptive and expressive communication skills should be evaluated.

# Communication

- A child who meets the educational eligibility criteria for autism may or may not also meet the educational eligibility criteria for speech and language impairment.
- An IEP team for a child who meets the criteria for autism but does *not* meet the educational eligibility criteria for speech and language impairment may decide the child requires speech and language as a related service in order for the child to benefit from special education.

# Communication

- Language and communication needs may be met by direct service from a speech and language pathologist or by others, including the regular education teacher or other special education providers.
- More information on assessment of speech and language impairments may be found at

<http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/pdf/slguide.pdf>

# PI 11.36 (8) (b) 3: DEVELOPMENTAL RATES AND SEQUENCES

- *3. The child exhibits delays, arrests, or regressions in motor, sensory, social or learning skills. The child may exhibit precocious or advanced skill development, while other skills may develop at normal or extremely depressed rates. The child may not follow normal developmental patterns in the acquisition of skills.*
- A child may be eligible if this is “yes” or “no”.

# Developmental Rates & Sequences

- Developmental rates and sequences of students with autism typically include a splintering of skills with clear strengths and weaknesses.
- Students with autism typically exhibit advanced or precocious development in certain concrete visual rote learning skills while at the same time exhibiting depressed rates in other areas.
- Students do not always follow a normal developmental pattern or progression in acquiring skills.

# Developmental Rates & Sequences

- Information in this area is often gathered through thorough developmental history interviews and record review.



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# PI 11.36 (8) (b) 4: COGNITION:

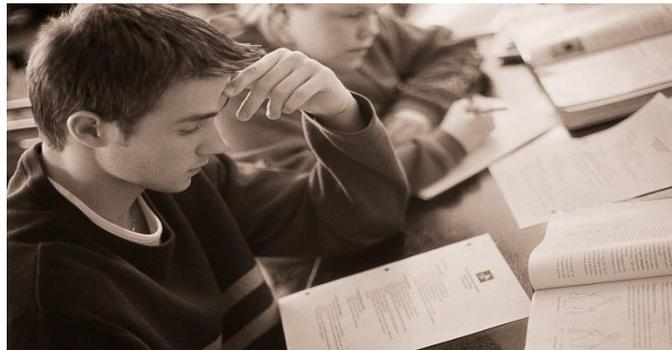
- *4. The child exhibits abnormalities in the thinking process and in generalizing. The child exhibits strengths in concrete thinking while difficulties are demonstrated in abstract thinking, awareness and judgment. Perseverant thinking and impaired ability to process symbolic information may be present.*
- A child may be eligible if this is “yes” or “no”.

# Cognition

- Students with autism often process information in a concrete and literal manner with difficulties understanding abstract and symbolic information or relationships. Executive functioning skills, i.e. attending, problem solving, organizing, prioritizing, generalizing are often compromised.

# Cognition

- Older students with autism may have academic performance difficulties despite high intellectual ability.
- Students may struggle with critical thinking skills (for example difficulty comparing and contrasting, discerning main ideas, sequencing, organizing, etc.).



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# PI 11.36 (8) (b) 5: SENSORY PROCESSING:

- *5. The child exhibits unusual, inconsistent, repetitive or unconventional responses to sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touch or movement. The child may have a visual or hearing impairment or both in addition to sensory processing difficulties associated with autism.*
- A child may be eligible if this is “yes” or “no”.

# Sensory Processing

- Sensory processing involves receiving information about the world around us through our senses.
- Sensory processing is considered a problem for students with autism if it interferes with the student's ability to function in an expected manner within the environment.
- This can be manifested through behavior challenges, emotional outbursts or unwillingness to participate.

# Sensory Processing

- The student may exhibit hypersensitivity (over sensitivity or sensory aversion) or hyposensitivity (under sensitivity or sensory seeking).
- Hypersensitivity may escalate until the student stops responding and appears lethargic.
- Hyposensitivity may also present itself as low arousal to sensory stimuli, causing the student to appear lethargic.

# Sensory Processing

- An occupational therapist with skills and knowledge in sensory processing is a critical IEP team participant when assessing this area.



# PI 11.36 (8) (b) (6): BEHAVIORAL REPERTOIRE

- *6. The child displays marked distress over changes, insistence on following routines, and a persistent preoccupation with or attachment to objects. The child's capacity to use objects in an age-appropriate or functional manner may be absent, arrested or delayed. The child may have difficulty displaying a range of interests or imaginative activities or both. The child may exhibit stereotyped body movements.*
- A child may be eligible if this is “yes” or “no”

# Behavioral Repertoire

- Students with autism demonstrate a need for consistency and predictability in daily routines and learning environments.
- Due to their challenges in processing language, social, sensory, and cognitive information, students with autism rely heavily on learned predictable rules, routines and structures.

# Behavioral Repertoire

- Alterations in rules, routines, and structures significantly impact students with autism.
- Students may demonstrate rigidity and perseveration in patterns of thinking, and may have preoccupation with topics, themes, objects, events, or people.
- This preoccupation often interferes with their ability to function in the manner expected.

# Behavioral Repertoire

- Students may have a restricted range of interests and may resist participation in other activities or discussions about other topics unless provided additional motivation.
- Students may use objects or their bodies in unconventional or repetitive ways.

# Need for Special Education and Related Services – 3 Questions

- 1. Does the student have needs that cannot be met in regular education as structured?**
  - There is some level of variability within classrooms and schools have an obligation to address it.
  - The IEP team must examine the regular education environment and identify the student's needs that cannot be met in that environment as structured.
  - If the student's needs can be met within the regular education program as structured at the time of the evaluation the IEP team may decide the student meets the eligibility criteria for the impairment but does not need special education.

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# Need for Special Education and Related Services – 3 Questions

- 2. What are the modifications, if any, that can be made in the regular education program to meet the child's identified needs and that will allow the child to access the general education curriculum and meet the educational standards that apply to all children (consider adaptation of content, methodology or delivery of instruction)?**
- Appropriate modifications in the regular education classroom may or may not require special education and related services.

# Need for Special Education and Related Services – 3 Questions

- 3. What are the additions or modifications, if any, that the child needs which are not provided through the general education curriculum (consider replacement content, expanded core curriculum or other supports)?**
- Does the student have needs that are not met in regular education even after that environment is carefully scrutinized and appropriate modifications are explored?
  - If so, the IEP team must identify any instruction and supports outside of the regular education curriculum that the student needs.

# IEP Development and Placement

- If the IEP team determines a student meets the eligibility criteria and has a need for special education, the student then has, or continues to have, a disability.
- The next step for the IEP team is to develop an IEP and determine placement for the student.

# Resources

- Special Education Eligibility Areas of Impairment and Criteria: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/eligibility.html>
- DPI's Autism Webpage: <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/autism.html>
- DPI Sample Special Education Forms and Forms Guidance Document: [http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/form\\_int.html](http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/form_int.html)
- Special Education in Plain Language: <http://www.specialed.us/pl-07/pl07-index.html>

# Questions?

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