

# DONNA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



*"THE DISTRICT"*

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION OPERATING PROCEDURES EVALUATIONS SUPPLEMENT**

# DONNA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION OPERATING PROCEDURES

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The Donna Independent School District has entered into an Interlocal Agreement to cooperatively operate its special education programs under the authority of Tex. Ed. Code § 11.157. The Director of Special Education Services may provide for the efficient delivery of legally required special education and related services to the DONNA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT's eligible students with disabilities as set forth in the Interlocal Agreement, including the implementation of these Special Education Operating Procedures.

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## 2.14 EVALUATIONS SUPPLEMENT—AREAS OF ELIGIBILITY

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Donna Independent School District Board Policy along with these *Special Education Operating Procedures* constitute the Policies and Procedures of Donna Independent School District, designed to be consistent with the State policies and procedures developed pursuant to the IDEA. Donna Independent School District *Special Education Operating Procedures* are not to be for the purpose of creating a requirement that is not otherwise imposed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act ("IDEA"), together with its implementing federal regulations, state statutes and rules, as they shall from time to time be amended, and shall not be construed to create a higher standard than that established by IDEA. These *Special Education Operating Procedures* will be posted on Donna ISD's website. These *Special Education Operating Procedures* should be interpreted consistent with the IDEA. DONNA I.S.D.'s *Special Education Operating Procedures* are reviewed and updated, as needed, on at least an annual basis. Donna Independent School District will make timely changes to policies and procedures in response to IDEA amendments, regulatory or rule changes, changes to state policy, or new legal interpretation as are necessary to bring Donna Independent School District into compliance with the requirements of IDEA. Donna Independent School District maintains systems to ensure that all students with disabilities residing in the Donna Independent School District, including students with disabilities attending non-public schools, regardless of the severity of their disabilities, and who are in need of special education and related services, are identified, located, and evaluated and provided a free appropriate public education. Donna Independent School District maintains systems to ensure that students with disabilities and their parents are afforded the procedural safeguards required under the IDEA (and its implementing federal regulations, state statutes and rules) including with respect to the confidentiality of records and personally identifiable information.

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## AUTISM

Students with autism typically have a developmental disability *significantly* impacting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction which adversely affects a student's educational performance. This delay generally manifests prior to age 3.<sup>1</sup>

A student may not be determined eligible as a student with autism if the student's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the student has an emotional disturbance.<sup>2</sup>

The written evaluation report by the group of qualified professionals must include specific recommendations for behavioral interventions and strategies.<sup>3</sup>

Additional characteristics associated with autism may include—

- engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements;
- resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines; and/or
- unusual responses to sensory experiences.

A student who manifests the characteristics of autism after age 3 could be identified as having autism if the criteria in this section are identified.<sup>4</sup>

The definitions of conditions or categories that are used for purposes of establishing an individual's eligibility for mental health services, as found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), are not synonymous with criteria used for determining whether a child is a "child with a disability" for purposes of establishing eligibility for services under the IDEA.<sup>5</sup> The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having autism will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

**PRACTICE GUIDE**—When evaluating a student suspected of having autism, the group of qualified professionals conducting the evaluation may consider components such as observations during structured and unstructured times, autism rating scales by more than one rater, speech and language assessment, functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and private evaluation reports diagnosing autism. Private evaluation reports diagnosing or identifying autism may be considered along with the District's autism evaluation of the student. If appropriate to understand the private evaluation report and its recommendations or conclusions, the District may seek the parent's or guardian's consent to release and exchange confidential information with the private provider. If appropriate, the group is encouraged to make recommendations concerning strategies for students with autism as necessary for the development of the IEP. See also SECTION 3.3: FAPE. Recommendations in the evaluation report should be based upon the student's unique needs rather than the area of eligibility.

## DEAF-BLINDNESS

A student who may be eligible under the category of deaf-blindness must have concurrent or coexistent hearing and visual impairments. Additionally, the combination of these impairments must cause such severe

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<sup>1</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(1)

<sup>2</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(1)(ii)

<sup>3</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(1)

<sup>4</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(1)(iii)

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Coe (OSEP 9/14/1999)

communication and other developmental and educational needs that the eligible student cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.<sup>6</sup>

A student with deaf-blindness is one who, based on an evaluation conducted in accordance with the procedures outlined in **SECTION 2.0: EVALUATIONS**, meets—

- the eligibility criteria for deaf or hard of hearing and visual impairment;
- the eligibility criteria for a student with a visual impairment and has a suspected hearing loss that cannot be demonstrated conclusively, but a speech/language therapist, a certified speech and language therapist, or a licensed speech language pathologist indicates there is no speech at an age when speech would normally be expected;

A student with deaf-blindness is also one who, based on an evaluation conducted in accordance with the procedures outlined in **SECTION 2.0: EVALUATIONS**, has—

- documented hearing and visual losses that, if considered individually, may not meet the requirements for deaf or hard of hearing or visual impairment, but the combination of such hearing and visual losses adversely affects the student's educational performance; or
- a documented medical diagnosis of a progressive medical condition that will result in concomitant hearing and visual losses that, without special education intervention, will adversely affect the student's educational performance.<sup>7</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having deaf-blindness will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

## **DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING**

A student may be eligible for special education and related services as a student who is deaf or hard of hearing<sup>8</sup> if the hearing impairment is so severe that it impairs the processing of linguistic information through hearing with or without amplification, and that adversely affects educational performance.<sup>9</sup>

The group of qualified professionals must ensure that the evaluation data includes—

- An otological examination performed by an otolaryngologist or by a licensed medical doctor, with documentation that an otolaryngologist is not reasonably available, and an audiological evaluation performed by a licensed audiologist, and
- a description of the implications of the hearing loss for the student's hearing in a variety of circumstances with or without recommended amplification.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(2)

<sup>7</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(2)

<sup>8</sup> The terms *deaf* or *hard of hearing* are referenced in Texas law while federal law typically references the terms *deafness* and *hearing impairment*.

<sup>9</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(3)

<sup>10</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(3)

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of being deaf or hard of hearing will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination. The group should consider the student's unique mode of communication when conducting the evaluation.<sup>11</sup>

**PRACTICE GUIDE**—When evaluating a student suspected of being deaf or hard of hearing, the group of qualified professionals selecting and using standardized tests to assess cognitive functioning and academic achievement may consider whether the tests have been normed for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The group may request the student's most recent audiological evaluation report and recommendations concerning the student's need for amplification. If appropriate to understand private evaluation reports and their recommendations or conclusions, including recommendations for amplification and use of assistive technology, the District may seek the parent's or guardian's consent to release and exchange confidential information with the private provider. Recommendations in the evaluation report should be based upon the student's unique needs rather than the area of eligibility.

## EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

A student may be eligible for special education and related services as a student with an emotional disturbance if the student exhibits one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance:

- an inability to learn, which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
- an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
- inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
- a tendency to develop fears or physical symptoms associated with personal or school problems.

The term "emotional disturbance" also includes students with schizophrenia. The term does not include a student who is socially maladjusted unless the ARD Committee determines based on evaluation by a group of qualified professionals that the student has an emotional disturbance consistent with the criteria outlined above.<sup>12</sup> The term "social maladjustment" is a persistent pattern of violating social norms with truancy, substance abuse, perpetual struggle with authority or manipulation.<sup>13</sup>

With respect to the criterion that the student manifest one or more characteristics of emotional disturbance to a "marked degree," this generally refers to the frequency, duration, or intensity of a student's emotionally disturbed behavior in comparison to the behavior of peers and can be indicative of either degree or acuity or pervasiveness.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tex. Ed. Code § 29.303

<sup>12</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(4)

<sup>13</sup> *Hansen v. Republic R-III School Donna Independent School District*, 632 F.3d 1024 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2011); *Springer v. Fairfax County School Board*, 134 F.3d 659 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1998).

<sup>14</sup> *Letter to Anonymous* (OSEP 8/11/1989)



The definitions of conditions or categories that are used for purposes of establishing an individual's eligibility for mental health services, as found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), are not synonymous with criteria used for determining whether a child is a “child with a disability” for purposes of establishing eligibility for services under the IDEA.<sup>15</sup> IDEA neither requires nor precludes the application of the DSM criteria in making eligibility determinations. The DSM classification system may assist the group of qualified professionals in evaluating and diagnosing disability conditions in students, including the disability condition of emotional disturbance.<sup>16</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having an emotional disturbance will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

The group of qualified professionals must ensure that the written evaluation report includes specific recommendations for behavioral supports and interventions.<sup>17</sup>

**PRACTICE GUIDE**—When evaluating a student suspected of having an emotional disturbance, the group of qualified professionals conducting the evaluation may consider components such as observation during structured and unstructured times and/or a behavior rating scale including ratings by more than one rater. The group may consider additional components such as a functional behavioral assessment (FBA), disciplinary history, and the student’s history of in-patient or other hospitalizations or therapeutic placements. The group completing the evaluation may consider specifying examples of how the student manifests the characteristics that may be the basis of the student’s serious emotional disturbance eligibility. If appropriate to understand private evaluation reports, their recommendations or conclusions, or the student’s placement history, the District may seek the parent’s or guardian’s consent to release and exchange confidential information with the private provider. Recommendations in the evaluation report should be based upon the student’s unique needs rather than the area of eligibility.

## INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

A student with an intellectual disability displays *significantly* sub-average general intellectual functioning, coexisting with deficits in adaptive behavior, that adversely affects the student’s educational performance.<sup>18</sup> The student’s sub-average general intellectual functioning and coexistent deficits in adaptive behavior typically manifest during the student’s developmental period.

A student with an intellectual disability is one who:

- has been determined to have significantly sub-average intellectual functioning as measured by a standardized, individually administered test of cognitive ability in which the overall test score is at least

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Coe (OSEP 9/14/1999)

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Woodson (OSEP 4/5/1989)

<sup>17</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(4)

<sup>18</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(6)

two standard deviations below the mean, when taking into consideration the standard error of measurement of the test; and

- concurrently exhibits deficits in at least two of the following areas of adaptive behavior: communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health, or safety.<sup>19</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having an intellectual disability will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

It is permissible to have evaluation criteria that use intelligence tests to determine whether a child has a disability, provided that the intelligence test has been validated for the specific purpose for which it is being used, that neither the test itself nor its administration is racially or culturally discriminatory, and does not constitute the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child.<sup>20</sup>

**PRACTICE GUIDE—When evaluating a student suspected of having an intellectual disability, the group of qualified professionals conducting the evaluation may indicate the degree of cognitive disability to enable the ARD committee to develop goals that are appropriately ambitious, but not ambitious beyond what may be reasonably expected given the student’s unique circumstances.<sup>21</sup> The group may consider adaptive behavior assessments to guide the ARD committee in developing an IEP that addresses the student’s unique functional needs. Recommendations in the evaluation report should be based upon the student’s unique needs rather than the area of eligibility.**

## MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

A student who may be eligible for special education and related services as a student with multiple disabilities has more than one disability or concurrent impairments (such as intellectual disability and a visual impairment or an emotional disturbance and orthopedic impairment). The combination of these disabilities results in such severe educational need that the student cannot be accommodated in special education programs designed solely for students with one of the impairments. “Multiple disabilities” does not include deaf-blindness.<sup>22</sup>

To qualify as a student with multiple disabilities, the student must have a combination of disabilities and meet all of the following conditions—

- The student's disability is expected to continue indefinitely, and
- the disabilities severely impair performance in two or more of the following areas:
  - psychomotor skills
  - self-care skills

<sup>19</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(5)

<sup>20</sup> *Letter to Warrington* (OSEP 9/2/1993)

<sup>21</sup> *E.R. v. Spring Branch Independent School Donna Independent School District*, 909 F.3d 754 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2018)

<sup>22</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(7)

- communication
- social and emotional development; or
- cognition.

Students who have more than one of the disabilities but who do not meet the criteria cited above must not be classified or reported as having multiple disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having multiple disabilities will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

## ORTHOPEDIC IMPAIRMENT

A student with a severe orthopedic impairment adversely affecting her or his educational performance may be eligible for special education and related services. The phrase *orthopedic impairment* includes impairments caused by disease, like poliomyelitis or bone tuberculosis, as well as impairments from other causes, such as cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures.<sup>24</sup>

The group of qualified professionals that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of a student's eligibility based on an orthopedic impairment must include a licensed physician.<sup>25</sup> “Medical services” under IDEA are defined as services provided by a licensed physician to determine whether a child has a medically related disabling condition, which results in the child's need for special education and related services.<sup>26</sup> The Donna Independent School District will ensure that such services are at no cost to the parent.<sup>27</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having an orthopedic impairment will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

**PRACTICE GUIDE—** When evaluating a student suspected of having an orthopedic impairment, the group of qualified professionals conducting the evaluation may consider components such as a motor skills assessment. The group may want to consider additional components such as an assistive technology assessment and reports prepared by private providers. If appropriate to understand private evaluation reports, their recommendations or conclusions, the District may seek the parent's or guardian's consent to release and exchange confidential information with the private provider. The District may consider seeking consent for medical evaluation at District expense by professionals selected by the District, if necessary, to understand a student's eligibility for special education and unique disability-related needs. Recommendations in the evaluation report should be based upon the student's unique needs rather than the area of eligibility.

<sup>23</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(6)

<sup>24</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(8)

<sup>25</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(7)

<sup>26</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.34(c)(5)

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Anonymous (OSEP 6/3/2020)



## OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENT

A student may be eligible for special education and related services as a student with Other Health Impairment (OHI) if the student exhibits limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, resulting in limited alertness in the educational environment, which is due to chronic or acute health problems, and by reason thereof demonstrates an educational need for specially designed instruction.<sup>28</sup>

This disability category includes such health conditions as 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.<sup>29</sup> The list of acute or chronic health conditions in the definition of OHI is not exhaustive, but rather provides examples of problems that children have that could make them eligible for special education and related services under the category of other health impairment.<sup>30 31</sup>

The group of qualified professionals that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of a student's eligibility based on other health impairment must include a licensed physician.<sup>32</sup> “Medical services” under IDEA are defined as services provided by a licensed physician to determine whether a child has a medically related disabling condition, which results in the child's need for special education and related services.<sup>33</sup> The Donna Independent School District will ensure that such services are at no cost to the parent.<sup>34</sup>

**PRACTICE GUIDE—** When areas of assessment require the input of a licensed physician, such as when considering an Other Health Impairment (OHI), the District may either arrange to have the student examined at District expense by a physician selected by the District or choose to have a physician who has previously treated the student complete the OHI form. When the District elects to have a physician who has previously treated the student complete the student's OHI form or otherwise provide evaluative input, the District should seek the parent's or guardian's consent for disclosure and exchange of confidential information with the student's physician.

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having an OHI will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>28</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(9)

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> 71 Fed. Reg. 46550 (August 14, 2006)

<sup>31</sup> *Letter to Sterner* (OSEP 8/19/1998)

<sup>32</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE §89.1040(c)(8)

<sup>33</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.34(c)(5)

<sup>34</sup> *Letter to Anonymous* (OSEP 6/3/2020)

<sup>35</sup> *Alvin Independent School Donna Independent School District v. A.D.*, 503 F.3d 378 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2007)(Student was not eligible under IDEA because he had passing grades and success on state skills test evidencing academic progress; his teachers testified that, despite

## SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY

See also **SECTION 2.7: EVALUATIONS.**

Prior to conducting an initial evaluation of a student suspected of having a specific learning disability, in order to ensure that underachievement in a student suspected of having a specific learning disability is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or mathematics, the group of qualified professionals will consider the following:

- Data that demonstrates the student was provided appropriate instruction in reading and/or mathematics within general education settings delivered by qualified personnel.
- Data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal evaluation of student progress during instruction, which must be provided to the student's parents.
  - Documentation of the repeated assessments may include RtI progress monitoring data, in-class tests on grade-level curriculum, or other regularly administered Donna Independent School District or classroom assessments. Intervals are considered reasonable if consistent with the assessment requirements of a student's specific instructional program.<sup>36</sup>

In order to qualify as a student with a specific learning disability (SLD), the student—

- has been determined through a variety of assessment tools and strategies to meet the criteria for a specific learning disability;
- does not achieve adequately for the student's age or meet state-approved grade-level standards in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving when provided learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the student's age or state-approved grade-level standards, as indicated by performance on multiple measures such as in-class tests; grade average over time (e.g. six weeks, semester); norm- or criterion-referenced tests; and statewide assessments;
- does not make sufficient progress to meet age or state-approved grade-level standards in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving when using a process based on the student's response to scientific, research-based intervention; or
- exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both relative to age, state-approved grade-level standards, or intellectual development that is determined to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments.<sup>37</sup>
- Except that the student is not one with a specific learning disability if the findings specified above are primarily the result of: a visual, hearing, or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or emergent bilingual skills.

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his behavioral issues, he did not need special education and was achieving social success in school; many of his behavioral problems resulted from non-ADHD related issues like alcohol abuse and a death in the family).

<sup>36</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(9)

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*; 34 C.F.R. § 300.309

When considering a student for eligibility as a student with a specific learning disability, the student must be observed in the student's learning environment, including the regular classroom setting, to document the student's academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty.

The ARD Committee must decide to either:

- use information from an observation in routine classroom instruction and monitoring of the student's performance that was done before the student was referred for an evaluation; or
- have at least one member of the group of qualified professionals conduct an observation of the student's academic performance in the regular classroom after the student has been referred for an evaluation and the school has obtained parental consent.<sup>38</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having a specific learning disability will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

## **SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT**

A speech or language impairment includes communication disorders, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, expressive or receptive language impairment, or voice impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance.<sup>39</sup>

The group of qualified professionals that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of a student's eligibility based on a speech or language impairment must include a certified speech and hearing therapist, a certified speech and language therapist, or a licensed speech/language pathologist.<sup>40</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having a speech or language impairment will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

## **TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**

Students with traumatic brain injury have acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as 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 apply to injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.<sup>41</sup>

The group of qualified professionals that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of a student's eligibility based on a traumatic brain injury must include a licensed physician, in addition to—

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<sup>38</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.310(b)

<sup>39</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.310(c)(11)

<sup>40</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(10)

<sup>41</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(12)

- a licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP)<sup>42</sup>
- an educational diagnostician, or
- other appropriately certified or licensed practitioner with experience and training in the area of the disability.<sup>43</sup>

“Medical services” under IDEA are defined as services provided by a licensed physician to determine whether a child has a medically related disabling condition, which results in the child's need for special education and related services.<sup>44</sup> The Donna Independent School District will ensure that such services are at no cost to the parent.<sup>45</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having a traumatic brain injury will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

**PRACTICE GUIDE**—When evaluating a student suspected of having a traumatic brain injury, the group of qualified professionals conducting the evaluation may consider additional components such as an assistive technology assessment and reports prepared by private providers. If appropriate to understand private evaluation reports, their recommendations or conclusions, the District may seek the parent's or guardian's consent to release and exchange confidential information with the private provider. The District may consider seeking consent for medical evaluation at District expense by professionals selected by the District, if necessary, to understand a student's eligibility for special education and unique disability-related needs. Recommendations in the evaluation report should be based upon the student's unique needs rather than the area of eligibility.

## VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

A student with a visual impairment may qualify for special education and related services if the student has an impairment in vision, even with correction (such as glasses or contact lenses), that adversely affects educational performance. The phrase *visual impairment* includes both partial sight and blindness.<sup>46</sup> Information from a variety of sources must be considered by the group of qualified professionals that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of the student's eligibility based on visual impairment in order to determine the need for specially designed instruction.

A student with a visual impairment is one who—

- has been determined by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist to
  - have no vision or to have a serious visual loss after correction or

<sup>42</sup> 22 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 465.38(b)(1)

<sup>43</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(11)

<sup>44</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.34(c)(5)

<sup>45</sup> *Letter to Anonymous* (OSEP 6/3/2020)

<sup>46</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(13)



- have a progressive medical condition that will result in no vision or a serious visual loss after correction.<sup>47</sup>

The group of qualified professionals that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of a student's eligibility based on a visual impairment includes a person who is appropriately certified as an orientation and mobility specialist.<sup>48</sup> The Donna Independent School District must ensure that an appropriately certified orientation and mobility specialist is included in any reevaluation of a student who has been determined to be eligible for the Donna Independent School District's special education program on the basis of a visual impairment.<sup>49</sup>

The written report from the group of qualified professionals includes:

- a medical report by a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist that indicates the student's visual loss stated in exact measures of visual field and corrected visual acuity, at a distance and at near range, in each eye. If exact measures cannot be obtained, the eye specialist must so state and provide best estimates. The report by the licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist should also include prognosis whenever possible and whether the student has no vision or visual loss after correction; or a progressive medical condition that will result in no vision or a visual loss after correction;<sup>50</sup>
- a functional vision evaluation by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments or a certified orientation and mobility specialist that includes the performance of tasks in a variety of environments requiring the use of both near and distance vision and recommendations concerning the need for a clinical low vision evaluation;<sup>51</sup>
- a learning media assessment by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments including recommendations concerning which specific visual, tactual, and/or auditory learning media are appropriate for the student and whether or not there is a need for ongoing evaluation in this area;<sup>52</sup> and
- an orientation and mobility evaluation conducted by a person who is appropriately certified as an orientation and mobility specialist and must be conducted in a variety of lighting conditions and in a variety of settings, including in the student's home, school, and community and in settings unfamiliar to the student.<sup>53</sup>

The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of having a visual impairment will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

## NONCATEGORICAL EARLY CHILDHOOD

<sup>47</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)

<sup>48</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(12)(C)

<sup>49</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(12)(B)

<sup>50</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(i)

<sup>51</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(ii)

<sup>52</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(iii)

<sup>53</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(12)(A)(iv)

Children between the ages of 3-5 who are evaluated as having an intellectual disability, an emotional disturbance, a specific learning disability or autism may be described as “non-categorical early childhood” for the purposes of special education eligibility.<sup>54</sup>

The group of qualified professionals that collects or reviews evaluation data in connection with the determination of the child's eligibility based on non-categorical early childhood must include the applicable members for intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, or autism. The group of qualified professionals conducting an evaluation of a student suspected of meeting eligibility criteria for a non-categorical early childhood disability will conduct assessments and observations, and collect data, as necessary for the ARD Committee to make an eligibility determination.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EACH AREA OF ELIGIBILITY

In Texas, eligibility is determined by the student's Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee.<sup>55</sup> The phrase *multidisciplinary team* refers to the group of Donna Independent School District staff tasked with using a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, academic and developmental information about the student, including information provided by the parent, as part of the special education evaluation process.<sup>56</sup>

- For more information about [AUTISM](#), please contact LSSP.
- For more information about [DEAF-BLINDNESS](#), please contact AI/VI Teacher.
- For more information about [DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING](#), please contact AI Teacher.
- For more information about [EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE](#), please contact LSSP.
- For more information about [INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY](#), please contact Educational Diagnostician.
- For more information about [MULTIPLE DISABILITIES](#), please contact Educational Diagnostician.
- For more information about [ORTHOPEDIC IMPAIRMENT](#), please contact Educational Diagnostician.
- For more information about [OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENT](#), please contact Educational Diagnostician.
- For more information about [SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY](#), please contact Educational Diagnostician.
- For more information about [SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT](#), please contact Speech Language Pathologist.
- For more information about [TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY](#), please contact Educational Diagnostician.

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<sup>54</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(c)(13)

<sup>55</sup> 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1040(b); 19 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 89.1050(a)(5)

<sup>56</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.306

- For more information about [VISUAL IMPAIRMENT](#), please contact VI Teacher.
- For more information about [NON-CATEGORICAL EARLY CHILDHOOD](#), please contact Educational Diagnostician.