

Colorado Department of Education
The Office of Special Education

Update on the Educational Identification of ASD

Where we were → Where we are → Where we're going



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Where we were

- In Colorado's Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA) autism was embedded in the category of Physical Disability

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graph TD; PD[Physical Disability] --> A[Autism]; PD --> TBI[Traumatic Brain Injury]; PD --> OPD[Other Physical Disability];
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- Criteria for a physical disability preventing the child from receiving reasonable educational benefit from regular education should be on the child's diagnosis and degree of involvement in the regular school setting..."

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Where we were

- School districts in Colorado could:
 - use the IDEA criteria to determine a child's eligibility for special education services with Autism which does not have "diagnosis" in the criteria
 - use the ECEA definition
- As a "local control" state, each district and BOCES may decide how to evaluate a student without a diagnosis
- In 2003 CDE began training teams to evaluate students using the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) to determine eligibility with Autism

Why Identify?



- Most children develop characteristics of ASD during their first three years
- Parents often report they had concerns when their child was 16 – 24 months of age
- Most children are not diagnosed until after they reach age 4 (CDC ADDM Surveillance Project)
- Earlier identification should lead to timely access of effective interventions and services
- Research has shown that most children benefit from early intervention

- Child Find or evaluation teams may be the first to evaluate a child
- Many rural and frontier areas of the state have no local access to clinics or physicians who diagnosis ASD
- 6 month or more wait for evaluation at Children’s Hospital or JFK Partners
- Some families may not be able to afford diagnostic evaluation
- Choosing another eligibility category (i.e. SED) could lead to programing for another disability and not focusing on the core deficits – behaviors and poor communication may be misinterpreted



Colorado
104,000 square miles:
27% urban
37% rural
36 % frontier

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Where we are

- SB08-163 created the 24 member Colorado Autism Commission with the charge of creating a 10-year strategic plan for the state
- The plan has 18 recommendations, 5 directly relate to education
- Recommendation 9. Create a new educational identification category of Autism Spectrum Disorders



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Where we are

- HB 1277 Made several conforming amendments in the Exceptional Children's Education Act (ECEA) to align with federal terms and requirements and/or terminology used in the field. Passed May 2011.

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graph LR
    PD[Physical Disability] --> ASD[Autism Spectrum Disorder]
    PD --> TBI[Traumatic Brain Injury]
    PD --> OI[Orthopedic Impairment]
    PD --> OHI[Other Health Impairment]
  
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The diagram illustrates the reclassification of Physical Disability into four specific categories: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Orthopedic Impairment, and Other Health Impairment. The original 'Physical Disability' box is crossed out with a large 'X'.

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New ASD Definition

Definition: A child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non verbal social communication and social interaction, generally evidenced by the age of three. Other characteristics often associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental changes or changes in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. **ECEA 2.08(1)**

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Criteria: An Autism Spectrum Disorder prevents the child from receiving reasonable educational benefit from general education as evidenced by at least one characteristic in each of the following three areas: ECEA 2.08(1)(a)(i – iii)

- The child displays significant difficulties or differences or both in interacting with or understanding people and events. Examples of qualifying characteristics include, but are not limited to: significant difficulty establishing and maintaining social-emotional reciprocal relationships, including a lack of typical back and forth social conversation; And/or significant deficits in understanding and using nonverbal communication including eye contact, facial expression and gestures; and

- The child displays significant difficulties or differences which extend beyond speech and language to other aspects of social communication, both receptively and expressively. Examples of qualifying characteristics include but are not limited to: an absence of verbal language or, if verbal language is present, typical integrated use of eye contact and body language is lacking; and/or significant difficulty sharing, engaging in imaginative play and developing and maintaining friendships; and
- The child seeks consistency in environmental events to the point of exhibiting significant rigidity in routines and displays marked distress over changes in the routine, and/or has a significantly persistent preoccupation with or attachment to objects or topics.

The child must meet each of the 3 eligibility criteria above to be eligible as a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. If the above criteria have been met, the following characteristics should be reviewed by the IEP team for further information about the ASD. These characteristics alone will not qualify a child as having an ASD. Check all that apply.

1. The child exhibits delays or regressions in motor, sensory, social or learning skills.
2. The child exhibits precocious or advanced skill development, while other skills may develop at or below typical developmental rates.
3. The child exhibits atypicality in thinking processes and in generalization. The child exhibits strengths in concrete thinking while difficulties are demonstrated in abstract thinking, awareness and judgment. Perseverative thinking and impaired ability to process symbolic information is present
4. The child exhibits unusual, inconsistent, repetitive or unconventional responses to sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touch or movement
5. The child's capacity to use objects in an age appropriate or functional manner is absent or delayed. The child has difficulty displaying a range of interests or imaginative activities or both.
6. The child exhibits stereotyped motor movements, which include repetitive use of objects and/or vocalizations, echolalia, rocking, pacing or spinning self or objects.

Receiving Reasonable Educational Benefit

- According to the School Law Bulletin (2002): *“The term educational performance is not defined in IDEA or in the regulations, and OSEP has consistently chosen not to define it. Instead, OSEP directs school officials to consider both academic and nonacademic skills and progress in determining whether a child’s impairment adversely affects his or her educational performance: “The assessment is more than the measurement of the child’s academic performance as determined by standardized measures.”*

Diagnosis vs. Educational Identification

Diagnosis

- Based on a set of criteria in DSM –IV-R or DSM-V)
- Is life long
- Impact on individual is mild to severe
- Used across settings to obtain public or private services
- May be determined by an individual or team

Educational Identification

- Based on law (IDEA, ECEA)
- Ends when student leaves school
- Must have educational impact
- Only applies to services in the school setting
- Must be determined by a team



Where we're going

- The new disability category and eligibility language went into effect on October 30, 2012.
- At this time, each Colorado administrative unit (AU) can begin the process of adopting the revised definitions.
- The new eligibility categories, definitions and criteria must be adopted in full by July 1, 2016.
- The former and updated IEP disability-specific eligibility checklists are posted on the CDE ESSU website at:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/IEP_Forms.asp



Where we're going

- **Continue to train school teams on evaluating students for eligibility using the ASD criteria**
 - Training on administration of the ADOS
 - PowerPoint on the new eligibility definition and criteria on the CDE website to be used by districts
- **Supporting districts and BOCES with technical assistance**
 - *Guidelines for the Educational Evaluation of Autism Spectrum Disorder*, a manual on the evaluation process for individuals birth to 21 (coming soon)



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