



SCHOOL-AGE SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Perhaps you believe that your child really needs extra services to do well in school. Or maybe a teacher has suggested that your child needs additional help. In both situations, only an evaluation can determine if your child is eligible to receive special education services.

If you, a teacher, your child's doctor, or another trusted advisor has concerns about your child's development, your child can receive a free evaluation to determine if your child is eligible for free School-age Special Education services between the ages of 5 and 21.

Federal law - the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - sets forth which children are eligible to receive school-age special education services. There are two sets of criteria: (1) age requirements; and (2) requirements related to the child's disability.

Age Requirements: To receive special education services, your child must be at least old enough to enroll in the local public kindergarten within your school district. In most states, children are eligible to enter kindergarten at age 5. Districts vary on when children must turn 5. Some require that children have their 5th birthday before the start of the school year, and others allow children to begin kindergarten at age 4 if they turn 5 during the beginning of the school year.

Your child remains age-eligible for School-age Special Education services until he or she turns 21, unless your child decides to graduate. Once your child decides to graduate from high school, he or she is no longer eligible for special education services.

Requirements Related to Disability: In addition to the age limits, to receive School-age Special Education services, your child must (1) have a disability; AND (2) need special education and related services because of the disability.

IDEA lists a number of disabilities that can fulfill the first part of the equation, including autism, speech-language impairments, specific learning disabilities, and a catchall provision called “other health impairments.” For children under the age of 9, a child may be considered to have a disability if he or she has a developmental delay (as defined by the state) in one of the 5 primary areas of child development.

It is important to emphasize that having autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is not enough on its own to qualify your child for special education. Your child must also need specialized services. A full and individualized evaluation will determine whether or not your child needs special education and related services.

Related Articles:

- [School-Age Special Education Basics](#)
- [School-Age Special Education Evaluations](#)
- [The Big I-D-E-A](#)
- [Are Four Years of High School Enough? When to Stay Longer](#)
- [What is a Developmental Delay in PA, NJ, and DE?](#)
- [Medical Diagnosis vs. Educational Eligibility for Special Services: Important Distinctions for Those with ASD](#)
- [My Child is Not Eligible for School-Age Special Education Services - What Now??](#)

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