



AUTISM SPECIAL EDUCATION LEGAL SUPPORT CENTER

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM WHAT PROFESSIONALS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S OBLIGATION TO MEET THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH ASD?

- School districts must provide special education programs and services which meet *all* of a student's educational needs, including academic, social, communication, sensory, behavioral, vocational, daily living, and organizational skills.
- School districts must consider the full range of special education services necessary to meet a student's unique needs resulting from ASD including, if appropriate, intensive services such as ABA, DIR/Floortime, pragmatics, sensory integration, literacy instruction, etc. An IEP Team can only consider a student's unique needs in deciding which services to provide. The district must provide an individualized program based on a student's IEP, and cannot operate from a "one size fits all" approach or only consider the services that are readily available or currently provided to other students.
- School districts must design IEPs to develop a student's individual educational potential.
- A student is entitled to the special education services necessary to learn the material covered by MCAS and the general curriculum.
- A student should participate with nondisabled children as much as possible. If appropriate for a student, the school district must consider services and accommodations to support placement in regular education all or part of the day.
- The new state Autism IEP Act requires IEP Teams of all children with ASD to consider and specifically address **each** of the following areas of need:
 - verbal **and nonverbal communication**,
 - social interaction skills and proficiencies,
 - unusual responses to sensory experiences, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines,
 - engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, any positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports needed to address any behavioral difficulties resulting from ASD,
 - social and emotional development,
 - other needs resulting from the child's ASD that impact progress in the general curriculum
- When determining eligibility for special education, the school district must determine whether a student is unable to make effective progress in regular education because of ASD.
- It is illegal for school districts to reduce or deny services for a student solely because of costs
- The school must consider a student's social/ emotional development as well as academic development when determining eligibility, and must consider a student's individual potential as well as chronological age and curriculum expectations.

Remember: You can impact the educational decision making for students with autism as a member of the IEP Team! Work with the school to create a program that is appropriate for a student, **and reflects his or her potential and competency.**

For help call the MAC AUTISM HELPLINE 617-357-8431 x224

IMPORTANT: Turn over for more information➔

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WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ENSURE THAT A STUDENT WITH ASD RECEIVES NECESSARY SERVICES?

- **Provide the IEP team with written assessment reports that:**
 - 1) summarize in writing the procedures employed, the results, and diagnostic impression.
 - 2) define in detail and educationally relevant and common terms, the student's need, offering explicit means of meeting them.
 - 3) are made available when requested by parents at least 2 days prior to Team meeting.
- **Write reports with your audience in mind:**
 - 1) explain and define terms for parents and other professionals outside of your discipline (i.e. ABA/Discrete Trials, Sensory Diet)
 - 2) be explicit in the recommendations page to support how the recommendations fit the student
 - 3) individualize your recommendations – explain why x number of hours is necessary and who should provide the service (qualifications)
 - 4) use language that is clear and concrete
- **Make sure that the IEP (present levels of performance, goals, and objectives sections) reflects a student's strengths and potential as well as a student's needs in all areas.**

These portions of the IEP are important, as appropriate levels and measurable goals reflect the need for intensive, coordinated services required by many children with ASD. The school district must write the number of goals and objectives necessary to meet all of a student's needs that result from ASD.
- **If a student's behavior impedes learning, make sure the evaluation & IEP reflects positive behavioral supports and other strategies and services to address his or her behavioral needs.**

Many children with ASD require positive and pro-active behavioral services, as required by federal law. School districts should not wait until a child's behavior becomes disruptive before providing support
- **Ensure that a student's IEP includes objectives and services necessary to make effective progress in the general curriculum and meet MCAS standards, and also includes services necessary to meet his or her social, communication, daily living skills, and behavioral needs that result from ASD.**

A student is entitled to an education that can meet all of the educational needs that result from ASD. Although the emphasis on participation in the general curriculum serves to raise expectations and increase achievement, schools can not ignore other important learning needs.
- **Make sure the evaluations and IEP determines whether a student needs either specific accommodations or an alternate assessment to participate in MCAS**

All students with disabilities must participate in MCAS. The IEP Team must decide whether accommodations or an alternate exam are necessary
- **The Team should not make decisions based on ideas that students with ASD have limited potential.**

Research shows that with appropriate services, students with ASD can thrive academically, socially, and increase communication skills.
- **Ensure the evaluations and the IEP Team discusses needs for extended day and extended year (summer programs).**

Schools must provide these services based on the student's unique need(s), and cannot unilaterally limit the type or amount of services or only provide to students who would regress without the service.

