

Short Paper #3
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IN 620

I had a parent come to me and tell me that their daughter who is in first grade was just found eligible for special education and related services under the category of Autism. She had many questions and this is what I explained to her.

I am sure you have lots of questions and are worried about your daughter. Please know that finding her eligible for special education means that she will get the supports she needs to be successful in the classroom through specialized instruction and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Your daughter was found eligible for special education and related services under the category of Autism. When the team sat down to discuss her eligibility for special education, they reviewed all the tests she completed for the evaluation. In order for her to qualify with an Autism Disability, she had to have characteristics of autism and have documentation that there is an adverse effect on her educational performance. Some of the characteristics they reviewed were impairments in social interactions, impairments in communication, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities. The documentation they would have used would be her teacher's observations and work your daughter has done in the classroom.

Your daughter's disability is having an affect on how she is learning in the classroom. This means that she will need to have supports put in place to help her learn in her own special way. This is done through an IEP or a Individualized Education Plan. This plan will be created every year by the IEP team, which is made up of you, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, an administrator, and any related service providers. You will get together at an IEP meeting where you will discuss your daughters strengths, weaknesses, goals the team wants her to work on, and accomodations and/or modifications she may need in the classroom and on assessments. You will also discuss how much time she will need in special education services, related services, and where is her Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The Least Restrictive Environment is the best setting for your daughter but also with students who do not have disabilities.

Every three years, instead of having an annual IEP meeting, you will have a re-evaluation meeting. The team will get together and decide if new evaluations should be done to see if your daughter still qualifies for special education services. If the team decides that yes new evaluations need to be done, then the process starts again.

The IEP that is created for your daughter is a legal document that holds the school accountable for your daughter's specialized instruction. The special education teacher will teach your daughter with researched-based instruction methods. Together with the general education teacher and related service providers, they will form a team that will give your daughter the individualized attention she needs to help her with her education. As your daughter grows and accomplishes her goals, she will get new ones to work on. These goals are to help her be able to access the general curriculum like her non-disabled peers.

I am always here if you have any questions. If I cannot answer them, I will be certain to find someone who can.