

APPENDIX V – 101

TUSD Standards of Practice: Autism Eligibility Determination

Determining whether a student has autism spectrum disorder can be difficult, because the characteristics of this disorder may resemble of a variety of other disabilities; including intellectual disabilities, emotional disabilities, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, communication disorders, and hearing and visual impairments. It is also made difficult by the variety of symptoms exhibited by children with autism, as well as the overlap of autism-like behaviors with other cognitive and behavioral disorders.

Common misperceptions of autism spectrum disorder can lead others to suspect that a student has autism. This may lead to a referral for evaluation for autism, when there is actually a different underlying cause of the behaviors noted. **When responding to these referrals, it is important both to identify concurrent disabilities (e.g., intellectual disability) and to clearly distinguish autism from other possible disabilities (e.g., emotional disability). Therefore, school teams must conduct comprehensive evaluations in all areas of suspected disability.** As a result, it is important to collect data from all areas of suspected disability prior to determining the need for an ADOS-2 assessment. In TUSD, evaluation for suspected autism starts with a direct observation of the student in the school environment and a CARS-2 (or similar assessment), before determining the need for an ADOS-2. No single assessment is used for determining autism eligibility. The ADOS-2 is only one possible component of a comprehensive evaluation, when considering eligibility under the category of Autism.

Referral for evaluation for possible autism---3 scenarios:

- I. Parent or school has concerns that the student has behaviors and learning characteristics resembling autism
- II. Student has a private/outside evaluation indicating a diagnosis of autism (with evaluation data)
- III. Student has a medical/outside diagnosis of autism (no evaluation data)

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<p><i>Scenario 1: Parent or School has concerns that the student has autism.</i></p>
<p>Home school team (must include a school psychologist and speech/language pathologist) conducts a comprehensive evaluation in all areas of suspected disability. The evaluation must contain the following:</p>
<p>A. A social and developmental history that includes family background and information on communication, social interaction, play, sensory development, and physical milestones. The history must address impairments in social interaction, restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped behavior, and impaired or delayed communication.</p>
<p>B. A current developmental or cognitive assessment by the school psychologist that includes both verbal and nonverbal components, if possible.</p>
<p>C. A current assessment of adaptive behavior containing information provided by the parent/caregiver.</p>
<p>D. A current communication/pragmatic language evaluation conducted by the speech/language pathologist.</p>
<p>E. A <i>minimum</i> of two 30-minute observations of the student in two different settings on different days. Observations should be completed during both structured and unstructured activities.</p>
<p>F. A current social/emotional assessment that includes standardized behavior ratings (e.g., BASC-3) <i>and</i> an instrument designed to assess behaviors consistent with autism (e.g., CARS-2).</p>
<p>G. A current evaluation of academic achievement/educational performance.</p>
<p>H. If the student has challenges in an area typically addressed by an occupational therapist (e.g., daily living skills, motor performance, attention, sensory response, and self-regulation), the school OT may screen (with parent consent), prior to the review of data, in order to guide the team regarding the need for possible formal OT evaluation.</p>

<p>If the results of the evaluation do NOT indicate characteristics consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder (i.e., Impairments in Social Communication and Social Reciprocity, and Restricted Patterns of Behavior):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team should conduct a MET, based on the data above, and determine appropriate eligibility, (e.g., ID, SLI, OHI, ED, not eligible). In addition, the must indicate that Autism <i>has been ruled out</i> as an area of suspected disability, at this time. • NOTE: OHI may not be used as the category of eligibility based on a medical diagnosis of autism. The student either meets criteria for eligibility under the category of Autism or is not eligible based on that category.
<p>If the results of the evaluation indicate characteristics consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder (i.e., Impairments in Social Communication and Social Reciprocity, and Restricted Patterns of Behavior):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school psychologist and speech/language pathologist administer the ADOS-2 as a team, with one evaluator and one observer. • The team will conduct a MET when the ADOS-2 assessment is completed, using ADOS-2 data <i>together with all concurrent evaluation data</i>, to make an appropriate eligibility determination. • (If the student displays severe symptoms of autism and/or concurrent disabilities that preclude the use of the ADOS-2, contact your Lead for consultation regarding next steps.) <p>Note: Educational teams do not diagnose Autism Spectrum Disorder; teams determine eligibility for Exceptional Education services under the category of Autism, based on a review of all evaluation data and an identified need for specially designed instruction.</p>

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<i>Scenario II: Student has a private/outside evaluation with a diagnosis of autism.</i>		
<i>Team reviews the outside evaluation data. (Outside evaluations should be held to the same standards as a TUSD assessment for autism.) Observation in the school setting is needed.</i>	Completed?	
	YES	NO
A. Does the outside evaluation contain sufficient information to determine strengths and needs and to develop an appropriate IEP, including an evaluation of academic achievement?		
B. Does the outside evaluation include an ADOS-2?		
C. Has the student been evaluated in all areas of suspected disability?		
D. Does the outside evaluation include a pragmatic communication assessment?		
E. Has the home school psychologist has completed two 30-minute classroom observations (with parent permission), in two different settings on different days? (Observations should be completed during both structured and unstructured activities.)		
If the answer to any of these questions is “No” then additional assessment is most likely needed. Follow the evaluation process described in Section I for missing elements of the evaluation. Consult with your Lead for direction, if needed.		

<i>Scenario III: Student has a medical/outside diagnosis of autism only (no evaluation data)</i>
While medical diagnoses are important pieces of information, which may create a suspicion of a disability, they do not answer all of the questions necessary to determine Exceptional Education eligibility. A diagnosis from a health provider is not sufficient to determine eligibility.
Home school team (must include a school psychologist and speech/language pathologist) conducts a comprehensive evaluation in all areas of suspected disability. The evaluation must contain the following:
A. A social and developmental history that includes family background and information on communication, social interaction, play, sensory development, and physical milestones. The history must address impairments in social interaction, restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped behavior, and impaired or delayed communication. (This may be taken from medical records, if available.)
B. A current developmental or cognitive assessment by the school psychologist that includes both verbal and nonverbal components, if possible.
C. A current assessment of adaptive behavior containing information provided by the parent/caregiver.
D. A current communication/pragmatic language evaluation conducted by the speech/language pathologist.
E. A <i>minimum</i> of two 30-minute observations of the student in two different settings on different days. Observations should be completed during both structured and unstructured activities.
F. A current social/emotional assessment that includes standardized behavior ratings (e.g., BASC-3) <i>and</i> an instrument designed to assess behaviors consistent with autism (e.g., CARS-2).
G. A current evaluation of academic achievement/educational performance.
H. If the student has challenges in an area typically addressed by an occupational therapist (e.g., daily living skills, motor performance, attention, sensory response, and self-regulation), the school OT may screen (with parent consent), prior to the review of data, to guide the team regarding the need for possible formal evaluation.
I. The school psychologist and speech/language pathologist administer the ADOS-2 as a team with one evaluator and one observer. (If the student displays severe symptoms of autism and/or current disabilities that preclude the use of the ADOS-2, contact your Lead for consultation.)