

Multiple Disabilities (MD)

EVALUATION FOR MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

The term multiple disabilities means that the child has more than one disability occurring at the same time. For some children with disabilities the cause is not known, but occasionally the cause can be directly attributed to chromosomal abnormalities, complications from premature birth or difficulties after birth, genetic disorders or malformations of the brain or spinal cord, infections, or injuries. Many combinations of disabilities are possible such as blindness-intellectual disability, or developmental delay-deafness. In order to support or educate a child with multiple disabilities, parents must know:

- Which individual disabilities are involved,
- How severe (moderate, or mild) each disability is, and
- How each disability can affect learning and daily living.

The different disabilities will have a combined effect, and that's why it's important to ask: **How does the combination of these disabilities affect the child's learning, balance, use of his senses, thinking, and so on?**

IDEA and Alabama Administrative Code give two examples of combinations of disabilities, but a child could have another combination of disabilities that causes severe educational needs-cerebral palsy and autism for example. It is important to know: how *each* disability affects the child's learning and functioning, and how the *combination* of disabilities does as well. Whatever the

combination, a child served under Multiple Disabilities category should have a special education program designed to address needs that arise from all the child's disabilities, not just one.

Multiple Disabilities

IDEA and AAC have defined Multiple Disabilities as:

Concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. Multiple Disabilities does not include deaf-blindness.

290-8-9.03(7)(a)

HELP IS AVAILABLE

When children have multiple disabilities, they are often eligible for help. More than 8,000 children in preschool (ages 3-5) received special education and related services in the U.S. in 2011 because of their multiple disabilities. More than 125,000 school-aged children did also. Shortly after the diagnosis is made, parents should immediately get in touch with their local early intervention system. Your school district can help too, beginning with a free evaluation of your child. According to IDEA, the nation's special education law, all children suspected of having a disability can be evaluated without cost to their parents to determine if they



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have a disability, and because of that disability, need special education services under IDEA. It is important to understand that a medical diagnosis does not mean the same as having a disability in education. Those special services are:

Early Intervention-a system of services to support infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth through 2) and their families. If a child is found eligible for Early Intervention services, staff work with you to develop what is known as an Individualized Family Services Plan or IFSP, which will describe your child's unique needs as well as the services he will receive to address those needs. Contact Alabama Early Intervention Services at 1-800-543-3098.

Special Education and Related Services-Services available through the public school system for school-aged children, including preschoolers (ages 3-21). The federal special education law called IDEA, and corresponding state law called Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), require that special education and related services be made available free of charge to every eligible child with a disability, including preschoolers. These services are designed to address the child's individual needs in the classroom resulting from the disability.

REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

If you feel your child is in need of special education and related services, the first step is to make a referral to your child's school indicating the challenges you've noticed, and request that he be evaluated for a disability. The team will review all data and reports and parental concerns to

determine if evaluation is necessary. If the referral is accepted, a formal referral form is completed, and you must give written consent for the evaluation to be done. The school has 60 calendar days from written consent to complete the evaluation process. If the referral is not accepted, written notice is given to the parent, and the child is referred to the problem-solving team.

Keep in mind that a child does not have to fail in school to be eligible for special education services. A referral for special education should never be denied based solely on the student having passing grades.

An evaluation is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs. The initial evaluation will serve to answer these questions:

- 1-Does my child have a disability?
- 2-Does his disability affect his educational performance?
- 3-Does my child need special education and related services?

Just the mere presence of a disability does not automatically qualify your child as "a child with a disability" under special education laws. The child must meet all eligibility criteria for two or more



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areas of disabilities. Eligibility criteria for the two or more areas of disability must be documented on the eligibility report. The minimum evaluation assessments required under each area of disability must be completed.

DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

When the evaluation process has been completed, the team has 30 days to review all the assessment data and scores, meet with all the other team members, including parents, and make an eligibility decision.

The team will collaborate and create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare to others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what individualized instruction and related services are recommended to help your child. If you disagree with the report, you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation or IEE, paid for by the school. The school is also allowed to deny your request for IEE, but it must take additional steps to prove its evaluation is appropriate.

If your child is identified as "a child with a disability" determined to be eligible, a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 calendar days of the initial eligibility determination. The data obtained during the evaluation is used to determine what services are required for the child to make educational progress. An IEP must be developed and in effect

before special education and related services are provided. The school must obtain written informed consent from the parent before the initial provision of services to the child.

Sometimes the test scores and data do not meet the qualifying criteria for disability, and your child is denied eligibility for services. If you disagree with the ineligibility decision, you have the right to appeal this decision and should inform the school. You will receive a written copy of your Special Education Rights from the school, which contains information on due process procedures to follow. Ask about possible 504 plan services for your child. You can also contact our staff for assistance.

RESOURCES

Content Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/

Children's Rehabilitation Services
www.rehab.alabama.gov/crs

Alabama Early Intervention Service
<http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/individuals-and-families/early-intervention>

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Stakeholder opinion is very important to our center. We invite you tell us what you think and make suggestions for trainings and publications. Complete a brief survey, call our center, or join our advisory committee. Your input is always welcome.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPTI>



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APEC IS HERE TO HELP

The contents of this publication were developed in part under a grant from the US Department of Education, #H328M150012. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer David Emenheiser. Special Education V.21



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