

The Role of Clinical Diagnoses in the Educational Identification of Disabilities

Students with special health care needs or a clinical diagnosis of a disability do not automatically qualify for special education. Many data sources must be considered in the determination of an educational disability and a clinical diagnosis may be one source.

An IEP (Individualized Education Plan) team must determine if the student meets the eligibility requirements for special education. Many children with special health care needs who do not qualify for special education are eligible for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Determination of Disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- IDEA requires that a multidisciplinary IEP team (a group of qualified professionals and the parents) determines if a child has a disability that requires special education services.
- Evaluation data and information from a variety of sources are used by the IEP team to determine if the child meets State and Federal eligibility criteria.
- All members of the IEP team, including parents, have the right to dispute this determination.

Data for eligibility evaluations can be provided by any combination of the following:

- Child Find Teams
- Multidisciplinary School Teams
- Physicians
- Private Clinicians or Therapists

(The above may include, as appropriate; a learning specialist, speech-language pathologist, audiologist, social worker, psychologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, school nurse, or other specialist. Child Find and multidisciplinary school teams must also include parents and a general education teacher in the evaluation process.)

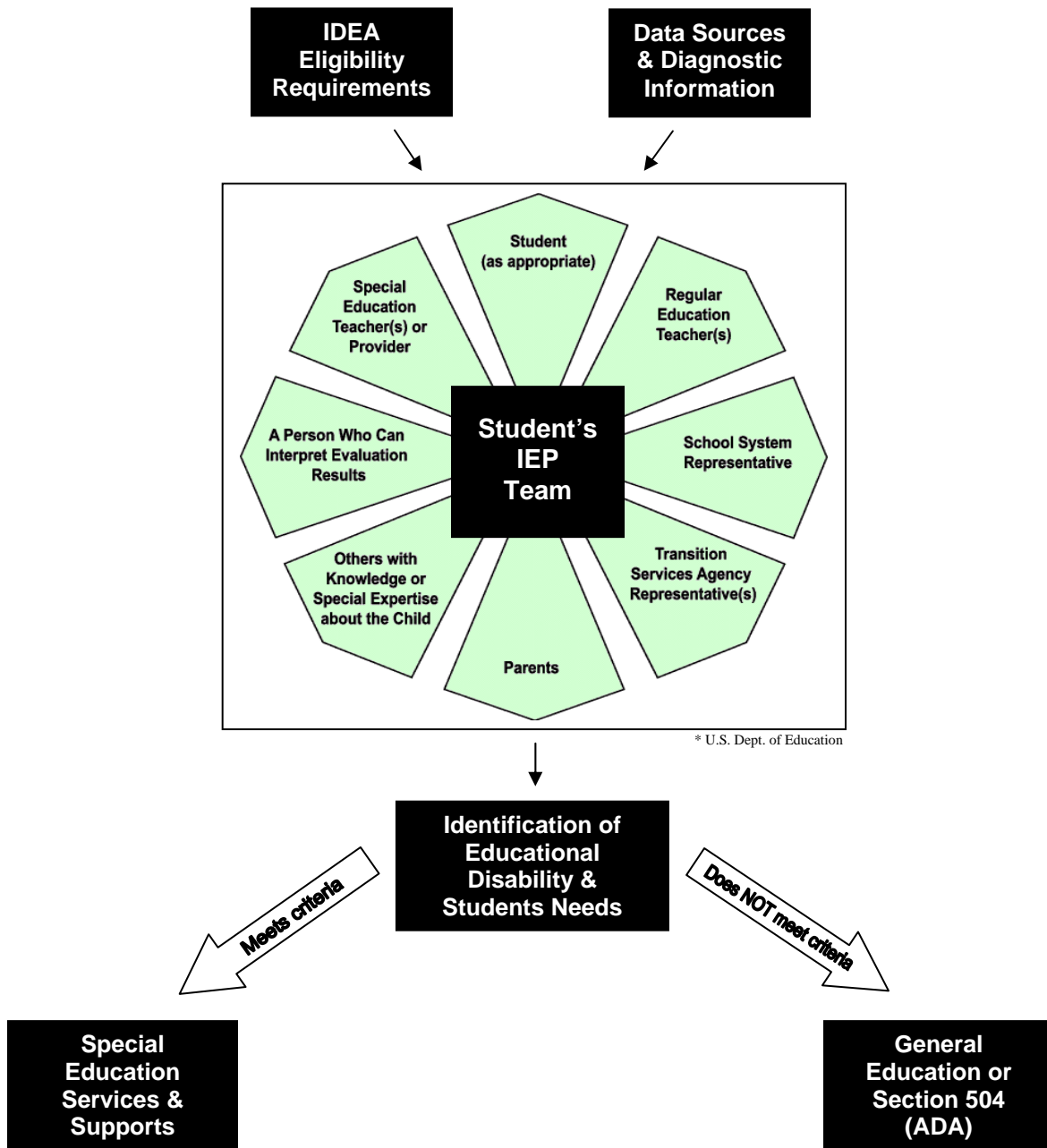
Eligibility evaluations may result in the determination of a disability and recommendations for instruction, intervention, treatment or further evaluation. However, the following cautions may apply:

- A clinical diagnosis of a specific condition or learning problem does not determine that the child is eligible for special education services in the schools.
- Terminology and/or diagnoses used in clinical reports is often not the same as the disability categories identified in State and Federal laws related to Special Education.
- Even when a specific diagnosis exists, in most cases it must also prevent the child from receiving reasonable benefit from education.
- Recommendations should include specific information about the student's needs related to education in order to support the development of an effective plan rather than designating specific programs or school services.

Continuum of Intervention for Children with Disabilities:

1. Child can receive reasonable educational benefit from general education and instruction without special education or supports.
2. Child can receive reasonable educational benefit from general education via strategies to enhance performance in the classroom and/or home. Parent(s) and classroom teacher(s) may benefit from educational resources/information.
3. Child can receive reasonable educational benefit from general education with accommodations to access learning. (Eligible for a 504 Plan.)
4. Child can receive reasonable educational benefit only with specialized instruction and accommodations. (Eligible for Special Education – see IDEA for details).

Eligibility Process at a Glance:



For more information on specific disabilities or eligibility criteria; please visit our website at www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped or call the CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit at 303-866-6694.

* Graphic from "A Guide to the Individualized Education Program" developed by the U.S. Department of Education, with the assistance of the national Information Center for children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY).