



IDEA: Determining Eligibility

Competency

Educator understands how IDEA law, state regulations, and district policies and procedures align in the process for determining eligibility for special education services. Every student, regardless of race, disability, or ZIP code, deserves timely access to the services they need to thrive at school.

Key Method

The educator identifies key components and processes needed to identify a student as having a disability and in need of special education and related services. Educators, including those who aren't special education teachers, research the steps for identification to support students who may qualify for special education and related services, and share this information with colleagues.

Method Components

What is IDEA?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that ensures children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education tailored to their unique needs and aimed at preparing them for further education, employment, and independent living. Prior to IDEA, over 4 million children with disabilities were denied access to appropriate public education by discriminatory policies and practices. Many children were denied entry into public schools, placed in segregated classrooms, or assigned to general education classrooms without adequate support (Katsiyannis, Yell, Bradley, 2001; Martin, Martin, Terman, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

IDEA has four distinct sections:

- Part A lays out the basic foundation for the rest of the act.
- **Part B lays out the educational guidelines for school children 3 to 21 years of age.**

- Part C recognizes the need for identifying and reaching infants and toddlers with disabilities, and provides guidelines concerning the funding and services to be provided to children from birth through two years of age.
- Part D describes national activities to be undertaken to improve the education of children with disabilities.

This micro-credential focuses on Part B.

Identification of Disability

To be eligible under the IDEA, a child must have a disability and need special education and/or related services to make progress in school. The identification process includes a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a team. The team considers the child's strengths and needs to determine whether the child is eligible in one or more of the IDEA categories. These categories are:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Specific learning disability
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment

Historically, students of color and multilingual learners have often been misidentified as having disabilities when the real issue is lack of appropriate instruction or biased expectations. It's important to note that under IDEA, a child may not be identified primarily because they speak a language other than English and don't speak or understand English well. A child may also not be identified solely because they haven't had enough appropriate instruction in math or reading. Consistent attendance and access to appropriate instruction are important factors when determining eligibility.

Impact on Education

A medical or educational diagnosis alone doesn't automatically ensure eligibility for IDEA services. The disability must significantly impact the student's performance in school, thus requiring specialized instruction and support. The team must determine that this student's educational needs cannot be met in the general education classroom alone. Students may need services received through an individualized plan in a variety of settings and with specific providers. The IEP process is used to identify the best types of support so every student can learn in the least restrictive environment, alongside peers whenever appropriate, to foster inclusion and cross-group unity.

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Evaluation

Determining eligibility requires that the three prongs of IDEA be met: There's a disability, it interferes with the student's education, and special education services are required for the student to make progress.

If all three prongs are met, the team can move forward to create an individualized plan for the student. In order to meet the requirements of the IDEA act, this team must include, at a minimum, the following:

- Parents/Guardians: Essential to the team as they best understand the child's strengths and needs
- General Education Teacher: If the child is participating in the general education environment
- Special Education Teacher/Provider: Shares specialized expertise on the learning needs
- Local Education Agency (LEA) representative: Administrator or other staff who supervises special education services
- Other specialists: Includes psychologists or providers who have insight into specific findings
- The child, when appropriate

When families, general and special educators, and specialists work together, they can design supports that honor the student's strengths and cultural background while meeting legal requirements.

Supporting Rationale and Research

P. Lipkin-J. Okamoto, The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for Children With Special Educational Needs — Pediatrics — 2015. Retrieved on July 17, 2018 from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/136/6/e1650>

U.S. Department of Education. (2025). Annual Plans and Reports Landing Page. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-overview/annual-performance-reports/annual-plans-and-reports>

U.S. Department of Education. IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/> on July 17, 2018

Resources

[What is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)?](#)

[What is special education?](#)

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[Your child's rights: Important terms to know](#)

[IDEA](#)

[How to Make a Pamphlet \(with Pictures\) - wikiHow](#)

[How to Make a Brochure](#)

Resources for submission

[IDEA Comparison Chart](#)

[IDEA Comparison Chart for submission](#): clicking here will create a copy in your Google Drive for use in Artifact 1

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and receive a proficient score for all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

250 - 500 words

Answer the following contextual questions to help assessors understand your current situation. *Please don't include any information that identifies you to reviewers.*

1. Describe the students you regularly work with, the learning environment in which you teach, and the students impacted by your work on this micro-credential.
2. Describe your current understanding of your district's process to determine eligibility for special education and related services.
3. Based on the most recent data available, how many students in your district are identified as students with disabilities, and what percentage of the total student population does this represent?

Passing: All questions are answered completely and clearly identify the students and learning environment the educator works with, their district's special education eligibility process, and the current data on students with disabilities in their district.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following **three artifacts** as evidence of your learning. *Please don't include any information that identifies you or your students to reviewers.*

Artifact 1: IDEA Comparison Chart

Make a copy of the provided template (in the Resources section) and complete the three-column chart to compare eligibility requirements for special education and related services at the federal, state, and local levels.

- *To complete column 1*, refer to the resources in this micro-credential and list the federal requirements to determine eligibility for special education and related services.
- *To complete column 2*, refer to your state department website and list state requirements to determine eligibility for special education and related services. Include a link to the list.
- *To complete column 3*, identify the process within your building to determine eligibility for special education and related services. Include the steps from initial observation to final determination.

Write a comparison of the three columns and how your state and district align with federal mandates. Include ways your district or state process goes beyond the expectation of the federal mandates or augments the process to serve your students. Explain how IDEA requirements are reflected in your building's process.

Artifact 2: Informational Handout

Design a shareable document (one-pager, infographic, flyer, pamphlet) that explains the process to determine eligibility for special education services. Handout should include:

- Your identified audience (educators, parents, community members, or students)
- A summary of the federal IDEA laws
- State laws and regulations
- Building Process
- Links to at least three relevant resources for your chosen audience

Artifact 3: Presentation

Identify gaps or strengths in your state or local laws/policies. Create a presentation that could be shared with colleagues or other stakeholders. Presentation should:

- Consist of at least five slides
- Identify target audience
- Use facilitator notes to explain each slide
- Identify at least two strengths and two weaknesses in the local eligibility determination process
- Make at least two recommendations for improvement to your school site/district process

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Artifact 1: Comparison Chart	All three sections of the chart are complete and accurately reflect federal, state, and local eligibility requirements. Comparison identifies how your district process meets the requirements of the state and federal mandates and clearly identifies if/where the process is expanded beyond the federal and state expectations. Explains clearly how IDEA shows up in your building's process.	All three sections of the chart are partially completed. Some sections may not contain accurate eligibility requirements. Comparison identifies how your district process meets the requirements of the state and federal mandates but may not include information about additional steps at the district level. Somewhat explains how IDEA shows up in your building's process.	The chart lists a minimal amount of information. Some sections of the chart may not be completed. Comparison is missing. Doesn't demonstrate how IDEA is visible in the building process.
Artifact 2: Informational Pamphlet	Pamphlet or other information document includes all of the following: -Identified audience -Summary of the federal IDEA laws -State laws and regulations -Building process	Pamphlet or other document includes three to four of the following: -Identified audience -Summary of the federal IDEA laws -State laws and regulations -Building process	Pamphlet doesn't reflect correct and accurate information. Pamphlet isn't designed to meet the needs of the intended audience. Resource links aren't included.

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	-Links to at least three relevant resources -Explicitly describes how federal, state, and local laws and regulations support the eligibility determination	-Links to at least three relevant resources -Explicitly describes how federal, state, and local laws and regulations support the eligibility determination	
Artifact 3: Presentation	A presentation has been designed that details gaps and strengths in state or local policy. The presentation has all of the following: -At least five slides -Identified target audience -Facilitator notes of explanation on each slide -Presents at least two strengths and two weaknesses in the local eligibility determination process -At least two recommendations for improvement to your school site/district's process	A presentation has been designed, but it doesn't include clearly identified gaps and strengths in local and/or state policies. The presentation has three to four of the following: -At least five slides -Identified target audience -Facilitator notes of explanation on each slide -Presents at least two strengths and two weaknesses in local eligibility determination process -At least two recommendations for improvement to your school site/district's process	A presentation doesn't include all required items and/or isn't at least five slides long.

Part 3 Reflection

300 - 500 words

Use this word range as a guide when writing your personal reflection on this micro-credential. For tips on writing a good reflection, review the following resource:

[How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?](#)

Please don't include any information that will identify you to reviewers.

1. Describe how this micro-credential has changed your understanding of and role in determining eligibility under IDEA. What will you do differently now?
2. What actionable steps do you plan to take now that you better understand the process?

Passing: Reflection provides evidence that the educator understands the special education eligibility process in their district. Specific examples are cited directly from personal or work-related experiences to support claims. Also included are specific actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.