



Arc Guide to Medical Diagnosis of Disability vs. Eligibility for Special Education Services

In order for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to be able to get some services that could assist them, it is often good to have an evaluation done. The evaluation helps see if a person can receive services from an agency. Often, a medical professional or a school district may do an evaluation. A medical evaluation and a school evaluation are different. The medical system and the educational system may do different evaluations. Those evaluations may have different results. This guide will explain the differences between a medical diagnosis of disability and special education eligibility criteria.

Medical Diagnosis

- Evaluation done by a medical professional
- States if a person has a medical condition or disease
- May include a medical history, physical exam, interview, review of records, observations, specific tests
- A clinical diagnosis based on specific symptoms that can be seen or known
- Often includes treatment recommendations that may include what an individual needs and should do
- Is different than an educational diagnosis of disability
- A medical diagnosis of a disability does not mean a person is eligible for special education

Special Education Eligibility

- Evaluation is completed by a licensed public school district staff
- States if a student is eligible for special education and related services (Related services assist a student to receive a free appropriate public education. Examples include some therapies, transportation, social work, etc.)
- Evaluation determines if student meets specific criteria/label. (There are several special education criteria/labels. Some require a medical diagnosis.)
- Looks at student's skills and abilities compared to other students based on standardized tests
- Focuses on how the disability impacts learning in school
- Is not a medical diagnosis of a disability

Resources:

Minnesota Rule Eligibility Criteria 3525.1325 to 3525.1354 Arc Guide to Special Education Evaluations

<https://arcminnesota.org/content/uploads/sites/3/2016/04/Arc-Guide-to-Special-Education-Evaluations.pdf>



For further information or advocacy services, contact The Arc Minnesota at 952-920-0855 or toll-free at 833.450.1494 or visit www.arcminnesota.org. (Please note: *This document is not legal advice, and should not be construed as such. Thus, no information herein should replace the sound advice of an attorney.*)

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