



Differentiation between Autism Spectrum Disorder and Emotional Disturbance: Eligibility Consideration Guidance

The following guidance was developed by the Education Evaluation and Consultation Center (EECC) for eligibility teams to consider when reviewing differential evaluation results for students who are referred for both Autism and Emotional Disturbance eligibilities. The intent is to assist school IEP teams as they interpret eligibility evaluation results for both eligibilities that often present with overlapping criteria. This is guidance for team consideration only.

If considering both an ASD and ED eligibility, the team should first review and determine ASD eligibility but stop at the question about ED eligibility:

If the student is currently eligible as a student with an emotional disturbance (ED) the team has determined that ASD is the primary disability.

The team then reviews the ED eligibility. If the evaluation data supported the qualification for ASD but only meets ED eligibility under the areas of “interpersonal relationships and/or inappropriate feelings and behaviors under normal circumstances”, those characteristics can be subsumed under ASD eligibility and not used as qualifying characteristics for ED.

However, if the student with ASD meets the ED criteria for “the inability to learn, and/or pervasive mood of depression, and/ or somatization”; then an ED eligibility may be warranted in addition to the ASD eligibility.

If the student did not meet the qualification criteria for ASD then any/all ED criteria may be considered and used for qualification. At the end of the ED eligibility decision, the team should then return to the ASD form, answer the ED question and finalize the ASD eligibility.