

Special Education Eligibility in Kansas: What Parents Need to Know

(Bison Bridge Behavioral Insights Parent Resource — K–12 Edition)

What Does “Eligible for Special Education” Mean?

Eligibility means that your child qualifies to receive special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). To qualify, a child must meet **two criteria** under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

1. **Your child must have a disability** in one of the 13 federally recognized categories
2. **The disability must impact their educational performance** and require specially designed instruction

Both conditions must be met. Having a diagnosis outside of school (such as ADHD, autism, or anxiety) does not automatically qualify a child for an IEP.

The 13 IDEA Disability Categories

These are the categories schools use to determine eligibility:

- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment (often includes ADHD, chronic illness, etc.)
- Specific learning disability
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury

- Visual impairment (including blindness)

Each category has specific criteria that the school evaluation team must consider.

What Is Considered “Educational Impact”?

Educational performance means more than just grades. A disability may affect:

- Reading, writing, or math skills
- Focus and task completion
- Social or emotional skills
- Communication or language development
- Behavior or executive functioning
- Participation in the general curriculum

The team must determine if these difficulties require instruction that goes beyond what is typically provided in a general education classroom.

Who Is on the Eligibility Team?

Eligibility is determined by a team of professionals, which must include:

- You, the parent or guardian
- A general education teacher
- A special education teacher
- A school psychologist or qualified evaluator
- A school administrator

Other specialists, such as speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, or behavior specialists, may also be involved.

What Happens During the Meeting?

The team reviews:

- The evaluation results



- Classroom observations and performance
- Teacher and parent input
- Whether the disability is causing a need for specially designed instruction

If your child is found eligible, the team moves forward with writing an IEP.

If your child is not eligible, the team may consider other supports, such as general education interventions or a 504 Plan.

What Parents Say

- “I didn’t realize educational impact could mean behavior, not just grades.”
 - “The team really listened to what we see at home.”
 - “Even though we didn’t qualify for an IEP, we still got help through a 504 Plan.”
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Parent Reflection Space

- What strengths and challenges does my child have at school?
 - Do these challenges affect how they access learning or participate in class?
 - What supports have been tried already, and what was the outcome?
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Important Reminder

Eligibility is about matching services to needs. You have the right to be part of every discussion and to ask questions if you disagree with the team’s decision. Schools must explain their reasoning in writing and consider all input you provide.

To learn more, visit www.ksde.org or request a meeting with your school’s special education team.