

When parents take their child to a doctor or therapist, have a medical or psychological evaluation done for their child, recommendations are made to benefit the child. Doctors often make recommendations for medical or therapeutic services to benefit the child and sometimes suggestions for school services. There have been times medical doctors have told families to request a 504 Plan or an Individualized Education Program (IEP) from their child's school.

It is important to remember this fact:

Schools have an obligation (must) consider any information from outside providers but are not required to follow those recommendations.

Special Education Evaluations and Decisions

It is the responsibility of the Area Education Agency (AEA) to evaluate students with disabilities to help determine their needs. If a student is found eligible for special education this information will help the IEP team make decisions about what supports are necessary and appropriate for a child to make progress in school.

Doctors, therapist and other therapeutic professionals make recommendations for private therapy and medical treatments but cannot determine if a child qualifies for an IEP or 504 plan or decide what services should be included in a student's plan. Again, teams must consider recommendations from outside providers but are not obligated to follow them.

If parents have any new medical information that they would like to share with the team they could choose to send it in advance of the meeting or bring it with them to the meeting, highlighting the parts most useful and informative and request accommodations.

Different Standards

It is helpful to understand that sometimes the difference between medical and educational recommendations for the same student is due to different standards and obligations, not because of wrong data or bad intent.

The medical recommendations that are made by doctors and therapists are always going to aim for the maximum growth, but could be limited by insurance approval.

The school IEP team is not obligated to provide services that will maximize a student's potential but instead must provide students with disabilities with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). FAPE is a term in Special Education that means students with IEPs are provided services that help them access educational experiences and make appropriate progress.

For example, a student who qualifies for Speech Therapy outside of school due to some letter production difficulties. The same student may not qualify for school based speech services if his/her speech can be understood by teachers and peers. If the speech difficulties do not interfere with the student's education, he/she will not qualify for school based Speech and Language Therapy.

Conflict Resolution

Parents who have a good relationship with their child's school and medical teams could consider connecting the two teams with email in order to open communication and get everyone on the same page.

If parents disagree with the IEP team about the services included in a student's IEP, they can ask for an explanation of that decision in writing, called Prior Written Notice, and consider using their other Procedural Safeguards.

Find some additional details in the chart below:

Question	Medical	Educational
Who decides?	Medical team determines the focus, frequency, and duration of services. Insurance may be a determining factor.	Educational team, including parents, student (if appropriate), educators, administrators, and school based therapists determine the student's educational needs and what support is required.
What?	Addresses medical conditions; works to get full potential realized.	Focuses on adaptation and intervention to allow student to participate, access their education.
Where?	In the clinic, hospital, or home.	At school, field trips, extra-curricular activities, on the bus, or in the community.
How?	Typically direct one-one-one treatment to accomplish set goals.	The student's educational needs are determined individually by the IEP team. Services may include one-on-one instruction, integrated or inclusive programming with peers, consultative services, etc.
Eligibility	Medical needs determined by medical professionals and approved by insurance.	Educational needs determined by IEP team.
Cost	Fee for service payment by family, insurance.	No cost to student or family.
Documentation	Dictated by insurance requirements and guidelines of the setting. Emphasis on medical terminology	Guided by the requirements of the state's IEP documentation.

ASK Essential Questions

1. Is there new medical information to share with the team?
2. Has the team considered the information that was shared from outside medical or therapeutic providers?

Related Resources available from ASK found on askresource.org:

- Special Education Evaluations
- Prior Written Notice