



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

April 2025
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A very common call that we receive at WI FACETS involves understanding why a child who has been diagnosed with autism by a medical professional may not automatically qualify for special education services under the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#).

A medical diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is made by healthcare professionals such as pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists, or developmental specialists. The medical diagnosis is based on criteria from the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders \(DSM-5\)](#). The purpose of a medical diagnosis is to determine whether a child meets the clinical criteria for autism, which can then help guide medical treatments and therapies such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, or applied behavior analysis (ABA). A medical diagnosis may also be necessary for insurance coverage of certain autism-related services.

While a medical diagnosis focuses on whether a child has autism, an educational diagnosis (also referred to as an eligibility determination for special education services) is concerned with how autism impacts a child's ability to learn and function in the school environment.

A medical diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder does not result in automatic eligibility for special education under the impairment area of autism. In order to receive special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under IDEA, a child must meet specific eligibility criteria that go beyond just having an autism diagnosis. Please refer to this [document for the eligibility criteria for educational autism](#).

If the IEP team determines that the child does not meet the criteria for educational autism, parents have the right to request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). This evaluation is completed at no cost to parents. This [bulletin](#) from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provides guidance on the process. As summarized from the bulletin, the law does not require the school district to carry out the IEE recommendations. However, the district must consider the results of an IEE that meets the district's criteria in any eligibility, program planning, and placement decisions about providing a free appropriate public education to the child. At a minimum, the district should ensure that an IEP team reviews the IEE and discusses the results. After the IEP team considers the IEE, the district must send the parents a notice regarding the team's decisions concerning the identification, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of free appropriate public education to the child. If the parents disagree with such a decision, they may request [mediation](#) or a [due process hearing](#) to resolve the dispute.

If the IEP team determined that the child does not meet the criteria for educational autism, the district may suggest (or the parents can request) a [504 Plan](#), which provides accommodations to support the child's learning without requiring specially designed instruction. A 504 Plan may include modifications such as preferential seating, extended time on tests, sensory breaks, assistive technology, or behavior management strategies. Unlike an IEP, which focuses on individualized instruction, a 504 Plan ensures that students with disabilities receive equal access to education through necessary accommodations.

If you have questions about any of this information please contact the WI FACETS Help Desk at our toll free number 877-374-0511 or 414-374-4645.

UPCOMING WI FACETS EVENTS

[Everyday Choices: Building Lifelong Skills for Supported Decision Making/Opciones Diarias: Desarrollando habilidades para toda la vida en la toma de decisiones con apoyo](#)

Date: April 2, 2025

Presenter: Molly Murphy, Educational Consultant

[IEP 5: Redacción del IEP- Parte 1](#)

Date: April 3, 2025

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

[Planning for a Loved One with Disabilities or Complex Health Needs/ Planificación para un ser querido con discapacidades o necesidades de salud complejas](#)

Date: April 9, 2025

Presenters: Kacy Seitz and Missy Burback, Special Needs Financial Planners

[Transition IEP Checklist](#)

Date: April 15, 2025

Presenter: Ann Zielke, WI FACETS

[Read, Write, Grow - Boosting Literacy Skills Together](#)

Date: April 16, 2025

Presenter: Nicole Aldworth, CESA 2

[IEP 6: Redacción del IEP- Parte 2](#)

Date: April 17, 2025

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

[Staffing Shortages: Recruiting and Retaining Special Educators](#)

Date: April 23, 2025

Presenter: Dr. Nancy Molfenter, Madison Metropolitan School District

[Twice Exceptionality \(2e\): What Is It and a Strength-Based Approach](#)

Date: April 30, 2025

Presenter: Teresa Nair, Parent Community Program Manager for REEL 2e

HOME LEARNING



APRIL 22, 2025

Earth Day is an important day set aside to inspire appreciation for and awareness of the earth's environment. It is celebrated by people in different countries, all over the world, who share an appreciation of the planet and a dedication to protecting its natural resources.

Learn about Earth Day with [resources](#) from Scholastic publications including SuperSTEM, Scholastic Math, and Scholastic ScienceWorld!

My Big World, “[Our Big, Beautiful Earth](#)” (Preschool)*

This themed lesson plan includes videos, games, hands-on activities, and skill sheets to engage preschoolers. Introduce on-topic vocabulary and practice skills such as group discussions, critical thinking, counting, and more.

Let’s Find Out, “[Thank You, Trees!!](#)” (Kindergarten)*

Introduce your kindergarten students to the beauty of the Earth’s ecosystem with a feature about the diversity of trees. Explore how flora and fauna play an integral role within the planet to provide habitats, oxygen, and food. Then, with a hands-on activity, make crayons, play games that explore pollution and littering, and watch introductory videos about the importance of conserving the Earth’s sights and features.

Scholastic News 1, “[Earth of Wonder](#)” (Grade 1)*

Dive into the Earth’s wonder with this interactive issue for first graders that explores environments ranging from mountains, oceans, skies, to soils. Show kids how each climate depends on one another, and ways to preserve these ecosystems.

Storyworks, “[Rescue in the Rainforest](#)” (Grades 4-6)*

Travel to the rainforests of Costa Rica to meet Snow White the Sloth, who miraculously recovered from a near-death experience, thanks to local conservationists who raced to help her heal. For grades 4-6, students will learn how changing environments can be deadly to local animals and how important it is to preserve animals’ homes.

SuperSTEM, “[Would You Rather Banish Ocean Trash or Zap Dirty Air?](#)” (Grades 3-6)*

This issue discusses how ocean and air pollution affect the planet and details how each contributes to differing ecosystems. Students will also learn about the different laws and policies that have been placed to offset these trends

*[How to Save the Planet: A Kid's Guide](#) *Enjoy the read-aloud, [“It’s Earth Day.”](#)

*Explore the [Recycle City](#) website with interactive games, other activities, and resources about reducing waste and energy use.



April is National Humor Month

The idea of National Humor Month began as a means to heighten public awareness of the therapeutic value of humor. Laughter and joy - the benchmarks of humor - lead to improved well-being, boosted morale, increased communication skills, and an enriched quality of life.

[Mad Libs](#) are a fun and engaging way to promote literacy by helping people learn and practice basic grammar skills like parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) through a playful format. Players fill in blank spaces in a story with words they provide, often resulting in humorous and nonsensical narratives.

[Knock-knock jokes](#) designed for kids.

To wrap up April on a humorous note, enjoy this read-aloud, [“Shh! We Have a Plan”](#).

Have Fun Learning with Hopscotch

In April, the weather is often nice enough to enjoy being outside after being inside for much of the winter. Why not engage in some fun while at the same time incorporating learning! Check this [video](#) for the basic hopscotch rules.

Math

Hopscotch can reinforce basic math skills.

Counting: Players count the numbers on the hopscotch board in order.

Number relations: Players learn what number comes next and how far apart numbers are.

Counting on: Players practice counting on from a number other than one. However, hopscotch can be modified to reinforce more advanced math skills. Check this [website](#) for some ideas

UPCOMING STATE EVENTS

[2025 Endless Possibilities Conference - WI FACETS](#)

Bridging Success: Empowering Every Learner!

Date: Tuesday, August 5, 2025 - 8 am - 3 pm.

In person – Location: [Waukesha County Technical College, Pewaukee Campus](#)

Registration is open: [2025 Endless Possibilities Conference](#) Fee: \$50

Teamwork makes the dream work! We’ve all heard this phrase, but how can we develop teams to make that dream a reality? The Endless Possibilities conference will provide resources and tools to build your knowledge to support all of our students with disabilities to succeed in school as well as in life!

This year we welcome Mike Hipple as our keynote speaker to share his first-hand experience and talk about technology and accommodations for students. We will also hear from young adults with lived experience in special education, engage in dynamic discussions around how to support engaged readers, learn what others are doing to support positive outcomes for students with disabilities to achieve their goals, and much more.

Please visit our [conference site](#) for more information. By working together, educators and families can help students thrive in school and prepare for success after school. Please join us!

We also have limited space for Exhibit Tables: [Exhibit Registration](#)

Spanish Interpretation Available.

[Circles of Life Conference](#)

Dates: May 8-9, 2025

Location: Wilderness Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI

Circles of Life is Wisconsin’s annual conference for families who have children with disabilities and for the professionals who support them.

[29th Annual Wisconsin American Indian Studies Summer Institute](#)

Dates: July 28-August 1, 2025

Location: Unity School District, Balsam Lake, WI

The annual Wisconsin American Indian Studies Summer Institute is an active, highly participatory, week-long workshop designed to increase participants' understanding of issues related to the histories, cultures, and tribal sovereignty of the American Indian nations and tribal communities in Wisconsin.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Opportunity to Nominate or Self-Nominate for Council on Special Education

Wisconsin DPI is seeking nominations for parents of children with disabilities, people with disabilities, general education teachers and special education teachers to serve on the Wisconsin Council on Special Education.

Please note that federal and state regulations require specific roles on council that must be filled. Priority will be to fill outgoing council positions that include parents, people with disabilities, general education teachers, special education teachers, and a representative of private schools. In addition, priority is given to ensure council representation matches the racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of Wisconsin's student population.

Council appointments are 3-year terms, currently starting **September 2025 through June 2028**. Typically, there are **4 council meetings per school year from 9:00am to 12:30pm** and **one virtual public forum in October from 5:00 to 6:30pm**. All meetings can be done virtually (online) or by phone. At times, there are in-person options for those that want to attend in-person. Travel is reimbursed for council members.

The role of the Council is to:

- Bring the voice of families, educators, and community members to Wisconsin DPI to share their ideas and experiences about special education in Wisconsin schools.
- Advise the State Superintendent of Public Instruction on how to support students with disabilities.
- Share information from Wisconsin DPI with families, educators, and communities.
- Provide input on state rules and requirements for special education.
- Provide input on Wisconsin's federal reporting to the U.S Department of Education.

To self-nominate or nominate someone to this council please fill out the [Special Education Council nomination form](#) and return it to Ellen Antoniewicz, ellen.antoniewicz@dpi.wi.gov. Check the [Wisconsin Council on Special Education web page](#) for more information.

ONLINE RESOURCES: Autism Spectrum Disorders



Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)

This site has an extensive list of links to information on autism. Also be sure to check their [Facebook page](#) for information related to autism.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) – Disability Category of Autism

The website includes disability category criteria for autism, information about trainings, and links to archived webinars. This site also has a link for more information on the Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation process.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) – Inclusive Strategies to Address the Behavioral Needs for Students with IEPs

This professional learning series provides resources and strategies to help adults address the behavioral needs

of students with IEPs in educational settings.

[Autism Society](#)

The Autism Society, and their nationwide network of affiliates, connects people to the resources they need through education, advocacy, support, information and referral, and community programming.

[Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin](#)

The Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin exists to provide a community for individuals affected by autism, their families, and professionals who serve them. Their goal is to increase the quality of life for those affected by autism and respond to the emerging needs of the autism community.

[Autism United of Wisconsin](#)

The mission and passion of Autism United is to improve the quality of life for each child, teen, and adult on the Autism Spectrum — as well as their families — while teaming with caregivers and educators to enhance every individual's unique needs, skills, and goals.

[Autism Navigator](#)

This website features a unique collection of web-based tools and courses that integrate the most current research in autism with an interactive web platform and video footage showing effective evidence-based practices. It is intended for professionals as well as families.

[Autism Source](#)

The Autism Source™ Resource Database, a product of the Autism Society of America, is the most comprehensive database of its kind. Autism Source employs a nationwide network of affiliates and collaborates with other autism organizations and professionals throughout the U.S. to ensure that the database continues to grow and is kept current with reliable resources for information related to autism.

[Autism Speaks](#)

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. They do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions.

[100 Day Kit for Young Children](#)

The days after an autism diagnosis can be overwhelming. The Autism Speaks “100 Day Kit” helps families of children ages four and under make the best possible use of the 100 days following the diagnosis. [A 100 Day Kit for school-age children is also available.](#)

[MyAutismTeam](#)

A the social network for parents of children with autism. The site provides emotional support from other parents of children with autism. Parents may gain practical advice and insights on managing treatment or therapies for autism. Parents can also share daily ups and downs in a judgment-free place.

[IRIS Center Modules](#)

The [IRIS Center](#) is a national center dedicated to improving education outcomes for all children, especially those with disabilities birth through age twenty-one, using effective evidence-based practices and interventions. The first module provides information on the early signs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as an overview of the difference between a medical diagnosis and an educational determination of ASD. The second module highlights strategies that have been shown to be effective in teaching appropriate behaviors and skills and decreasing inappropriate behaviors with children and youth with ASD.

[Scripted Stories \(Social Stories\) for Children with Autism](#)

Scripted stories, also known as social stories, are written to help individuals, particularly those with autism, understand and navigate various social situations or routines. “[Cleaning up my Toys](#)” and “[I Can Follow the Family Rules](#)” are two examples of social stories from the [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations website.](#)

[Supporting Neurodiverse Students](#)

The Supporting Neurodiverse Students Professional Learning System (SNS) provides adults the learning they need to implement evidence-based improvement strategies to support students with significantly divergent social and emotional learning needs. The SNS supports a district level grant (ES3) with coaching and technical assistance so that school teams enhance their system to better support students with IEPs.

[A Guide for Parents & Caregivers of children newly diagnosed with Autism](#)

Developing a system for organizing important information about your child can be extremely helpful during

their autism journey. This website offers a system for keeping important information organized. The Autism Society of South Central Wisconsin is a local non-profit Autism organization dedicated to improving the lives of all who are impacted by Autism by providing information, resources and support, while raising awareness and acceptance in our community. We can connect you to the services and support you need to help you on your Autism journey. Give us a call at (608) 630-9147 or email us at info@autismsouthcentral.org

Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([PBIS](#)) is a strategy schools use to teach children expected behavior. Check this [article](#) for more detailed information on PBIS.

If mealtime is often chaotic, using PBIS strategies at home can help establish calm, structured, and positive interactions. For example, if you are looking to increase respectful interactions during mealtime the following are some potential expectations.

Expectation Behavior Examples

- Be Respectful
- Use polite words like "please," "thank you," and "excuse me."
- Wait your turn to speak without interrupting others.
- Listen when others are talking and maintain a positive tone.

Tips for Implementation

Teach the Expectations:

- Before a meal, review the expectations as a family.

Model the Behavior:

- Parents can model respectful behavior during meals.

Reinforce Positively:

- Use verbal praise: "Thank you for staying seated during the meal; that was very responsible."
 - Create a simple reward system: For example, a "Mealtime Star Chart" where kids can earn stars for following expectations, leading to a family reward.
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RESEARCH

A Survey of the Experiences of Paraprofessionals with Roles, Training, and Communication When Working with Students with Autism

Morin, K. L., Nowell, S., Steinbrenner, J., Sam, A., Waters, V., & Odom, S. L. (2022). A Survey of the Experiences of Paraprofessionals with Roles, Training, and Communication When Working with Students with Autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 37(2), 96-107.

[Read Full Article](#)

Paraprofessionals are critical members of instructional teams for students with autism; however, little is known about their job preparation and professional development needs. This study addressed the gap in the literature by surveying 325 paraprofessionals in public school settings in the United States and Guam who reported working with students with autism. Data were gathered on paraprofessionals' (a) roles and responsibilities, (b) applied knowledge from different types of professional development, (c) perceived barriers to professional development, and (d) types and timing of communication with their supervising teachers. The results of this study have direct implications for individuals interested in developing a model of professional development that will meet the unique needs of paraprofessionals who work with students with autism.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Upcoming Newsletter Topics:

May: Mental Health

June: ADD/ADHD

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources you may use the [Word document](#). Send submissions to [Wendy Overturf](#). If you are unable to access the form, you may send the information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.

This monthly update is provided by Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, please email [WI FACETS](#).

The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter can be found online: www.servingongroups.org/newsletter



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