**Distance-Based ASD Evaluations**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**An Addendum to the Oregon Autism Spectrum Disorder Technical Assistance Paper (2019)**

**September, 2020**



**ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT**

This guidance was prepared by the [Regional Programs’](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/SpecialEducation/RegPrograms_BestPractice/Pages/Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-%28ASD%29-Education-Services.aspx) statewide Autism Spectrum Disorder Professional Learning Team (ASD PLT) in coordination with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). This document provides information that is *advisory in nature and non-regulatory* (except where citing state or federal rules and statutes). It is important for evaluation team members to adhere to the guidance provided by administration with their district or program.

Although some components of an ASD evaluation as specified via [581-015-2130](https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/viewSingleRule.action?ruleVrsnRsn=247786) may be conducted remotely with little difficulty, we recognize that best practice in ASD evaluation involves in-person assessment - particularly with regard to the required observations and direct interaction. However, circumstances associated with COVID-19 and efforts to protect public health are forcing us to identify novel and creative ways to ensure that children continue to be evaluated and served.

The purpose of this resource is to assist school district and early childhood program personnel in completing ASD evaluations while there is limited or no ability to assess students in-person. This document serves as an addendum to the [ASD Technical Assistance Paper](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/SpecialEducation/RegPrograms_BestPractice/Documents/asdtap.docx), published in 2019 to coincide with revisions to Oregon’s educational ASD eligibility criteria and required evaluation components. Refer to the ASD TAP for detailed guidance on the evaluation components and eligibility criteria. This scope of this guidance is limited to questions that have arisen regarding distance-based ASD evaluation.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of the [Oregon Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorder (OCASD)](https://www.orcommissionasd.org/) for their cross-disciplinary work to produce the [Position Paper on ASD Evaluations During COVID-19 Social Distancing Measures](https://www.orcommissionasd.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=47), as well as the Oregon School Psychologists Association (OSPA) for their work on [Guidance for Special Education Evaluation During COVID-19](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jGOAAg49frxxzDHdCgIA_-lPtTTLIEke/view).

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

*To jump to an answer, click on the question and then the “Bookmark”.*

*Links within Google Docs require two clicks.*

1. [It is permissible to conduct an ASD evaluation and determine eligibility using entirely distance-based assessment procedures (i.e. without seeing the child in-person)?](#tc22pwl2ju87)
2. [What cautions should teams be aware of related to distance-based ASD evaluations?](#idtuiarhn9wz)
3. [Can observations be conducted remotely?](#2lhhvfq3x4wc)
4. [Can all three observations rely upon recorded (asynchronous) video?](#ew8gkhff0fj5)
5. [Can we use previously recorded video provided by the parents?](#eg5l7ue4gzuq)
6. [If we use recorded video, what date should we put on the eligibility determination form?](#flgr2g9oyhm6)
7. [One of the observations is supposed to include the child interacting with peers. What if that’s not possible?](#xyytqhrp1xbs)
8. [Can the direct interaction be conducted by the parent while guided by the evaluator?](#vklwoaa6mnta)
9. [How should distance-based observations and direct interactions be conducted?](#stflpgrsfrd8)
10. [What guidance is available for SLPs in completing distance-based social communication assessments (SCAs); a required component of the ASD evaluation?](#ck4obs67l4t)
11. [Which Standardized Autism Identification Tools are best suited to distance-based evaluations?](#xpc8vvogvv7c)
12. [Is it appropriate to ask the child’s teacher from the previous year to complete an ASD behavior rating scale?](#6yrp321c2k42)
13. [Is it appropriate to remotely administer standardized, norm referenced tests (e.g., cognitive, academic)?](#5fjc6uanvbfa)
14. [How do we determine adverse impact upon educational performance in a distance learning context?](#2hy1x2c27o1t)
15. [The team completed a distance-based ASD evaluation yet remains unclear or undecided regarding ASD eligibility. What should we do?](#kix.tq9fj8009t)
16. [We set up an evaluation center. How should we decide which children should come in for in-person assessment?](#u2701acge8sa)
17. [Is it appropriate to administer the ADOS-2 in-person but with masks and related safety measures in place?](#8wwztic9hx2n)
18. [Are there examples of safety protocols that districts and ESDs are putting in place for their evaluation centers?](#3zcrrkp91omp)
19. [What guidance is available on three-year re-evaluations during this time?](#76de917fggb1)

| **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS** |
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| **1. Question: It is permissible to conduct an ASD evaluation and determine eligibility using entirely distance-based assessment procedures (i.e. without seeing the child in-person)?** |
| Answer: Yes. However, additional time, effort, and planning will be required to conduct the three observations (including a direct interaction) via real-time (synchronous) video and/or recorded (asynchronous) video.It is important to gather sufficient information for the team to answer each question posed by the eligibility criteria, striving toward a level of confidence that is commensurate with what an in-person evaluation would have provided.  |
| **2. Question: What cautions should teams be aware of related to distance-based ASD evaluations?** |
| Answer: Some children present with prominent behavioral characteristics of ASD that are readily identified by experienced evaluators. Establishing an ASD eligibility via fully distance-based evaluation may be comparatively straightforward for these students.However, other children present in a manner that makes it less feasible to establish ASD eligibility using only distance-based evaluation procedures. For example, some students manifest ASD in ways that are more subtle and challenging to detect, and thus require a deeper investigation with additional opportunities to observe and interact with the child. Some students present with a high degree of complexity. They may have other suspected or confirmed conditions that mimic and/or co-occur with ASD, such as ADHD, reactive-attachment disorder, anxiety, behavioral disturbances, and so forth. Evaluating these children and differentiating conditions is a complex task for teams under the best of circumstances!*Therefore, we encourage teams to proceed with a great deal of caution - particularly when considering an initial ASD eligibility based entirely upon distance-based evaluation procedures. Given the weight of an ASD identification, eligibility should only be established when the team has a high degree of confidence in their determination.* See item below for additional guidance on this topic. |
| **3. Question: Can observations be conducted remotely (not in-person)?** |
| Answer: Yes. See guidance below under “*How should distance-based observations and direct interactions be conducted?*” |
| **4. Question: Can all three observations rely upon recorded (asynchronous) video?** |
| Answer: We advise against entirely recorded video. Although recorded video may be used, it should be accompanied by at least one or more real-time (synchronous) observations.  |

| **5. Question: Can we use previously recorded video provided by the parents?** |
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| Answer: Yes. Video of the child depicted at earlier stages of development should be considered part of the developmental history provided by the parent. Recently captured video that accurately represents the child’s current presentation may be used as an observation, presuming it depicts behaviors relevant to determining ASD eligibility.  |
| **6. Question: If we use recorded video, what date should we put on the eligibility determination form?** |
| Answer: Enter the date that the evaluator or team viewed the video for assessment purposes. The time during which the video was recorded should be noted somewhere in the evaluation report. |
| **7. Question: One of the observations is supposed to include the child interacting with peers. What if that’s not possible?** |
| Answer: Observation of the child interacting with a familiar adult is permissible if observation among one or more peers is not possible. However, teams should make the attempt to observe the child with peers. Parents may be able to provide a video recording of the child playing with one or more siblings or peers. Distance learning may provide opportunities to observe the child with peers in a virtual setting. For example, some teachers are grouping children in Zoom breakout rooms, or providing opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction during whole group, online instruction.In the evaluation report, document any attempts to observe the child among peers, and explain why it was necessary instead to utilize an interaction with a familiar adult. |
| **8. Question: Can the direct interaction be conducted by the parent while guided by the evaluator?**  |
| Answer: Yes, the direct interaction can be parent-mediated as long as the licensed professional knowledgeable of ASD directs and guides the activities. The evaluator should identify engaging, developmentally appropriate activities that will press for behavioral indicators of ASD. The direct interaction is a very important component of the evaluation, during which the evaluator interacts (or guides interaction) with the child in an intentional, purposeful, and strategic manner to elicit skills that we expect to be adversely impacted in some way if indeed the child is on the autism spectrum. The child’s performance is viewed through a lens informed by an understanding of ASD and typical child development. |
| **9. Question: How should distance-based observations and direct interactions be conducted?** |
| Distance-based observations may be completed via real-time (synchronous) video conference or via recorded (asynchronous) video. At least one of the observations must involve direct interaction; the others may be unstructured. One of the observations must include the child interacting with one or more peers if possible - or with a familiar adult.**Synchronous (live) unstructured observation tips:*** Discuss and plan the observation with the parent in advance. Discuss technical aspects to ensure good sound and image. Ensure that:
	+ Child is well lit; do not aim the camera toward the child in front of a window or other source of bright light.
	+ Child remains in frame as much of the time as possible, close enough to observe facial expressions and gestures.
	+ Environment should be as free as possible from visual and auditory distractions.
* Ensure that the parent understands what activities, skills, and behaviors are of interest for observation. Enlist parents’ ideas and suggestions. Once they understand what the evaluator is hoping to see and why, they may have excellent ideas on what to show (see “Synchronous direct interaction ideas” below).
* Note that some parents may need to be provided with the technology necessary for a video-conference observation.

**Synchronous (live) unstructured observation ideas:*** Observe during a routine, activity, or play-times at home.
* Coordinate with the child’s teacher or service provider to observe during distance learning (e.g., morning meeting). May need to take steps to minimize any distractions caused by the evaluator’s presence (mute camera and mic).
	+ If possible, identify an observation time during which the child is more likely to be interacting with one or more peers (e.g., during social skill/social emotional learning (SEL) lessons)

**Synchronous (live) direct interaction ideas:*** The [Brief Observation of Symptoms of Autism (BOSA)](https://www.semel.ucla.edu/autism/bosa-training) may be utilized as a parent-mediated direct interaction during which the evaluator guides the parent through a series of activities.
	+ Design of the BOSA is based upon the ADOS-2, and should be administered and scored only by those trained and currently fluent with the ADOS-2.
	+ Like the ADOS-2, the BOSA has four levels to accommodate all ages and levels of language development.
	+ A number of toys/materials must be purchased to administer the BOSA. These items are combined with existing ADOS-2 kit materials to form a complete set of BOSA stimulus materials.
	+ **Note:** Even if you do not plan to use the BOSA, it may be helpful to view the training videos and read the manual and related materials because this will provide teams with ideas for generating their own list of developmentally appropriate activities or presses.
* The [TELE-ASD-PEDS](https://vkc.vumc.org/vkc/triad/tele-asd-peds) is a tool specifically designed for distance-based evaluation of children under 3 years of age.
	+ Using the TELE-ASD-PEDS, the evaluator walks a parent through several basic tasks with the child. These tasks allow the provider to watch for the presence of autism symptoms. Administration takes 10-20 minutes.
	+ The administration guidelines and rating form are freely available online.
	+ Those evaluating students older than 3 years may find review of the TELE-ASD-PEDS helpful for activity ideas for assessing more significantly impacted children, and how to construct parent guidance.
* A parent-mediated direct interaction can be conducted via a series of developmentally appropriate activities pre-planned by the evaluator.
	+ For younger children with significant needs, various [communication temptations](https://childdevelopmentprograms.ca/elearning-modules/the-power-of-play/story_content/external_files/Communication%20Temptation%20Ideas.pdf) may be selected to probe for social communication skills and behaviors.
	+ Provide parents with written directions, such as [this early childhood guidance](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GICgXTooaWQEJv0aIFFZm7LrrQvocIIk/view?usp=sharing) developed by staff at Southern Oregon Regional Program (SOESD).
	+ Columbia Regional Program developed protocols that evaluators may use to guide parent-mediated direct interactions (for use by licensed professionals knowledgeable of the behavioral characteristics of ASD).
		- [Parent-Mediated Direct Interaction (Ages 2 to 5, pre-verbal/single words)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ogK26A-pPJJv46GL75GdZTX-NGY-j5V-gUthlTr9pok/edit?usp=sharing)
		- [Parent-Mediated Direct Interaction (Ages 5 and up, pre-verbal/single words)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lhXCSFND390Mcvdh05K_SYSiJpSGGsL7XII6kFIk3HM/edit?usp=sharing)
		- [Parent-Mediated Direct Interaction (Ages 5 to 10, phrase speech/simple sentences)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hHiBAG2zXpg5yd4TITRxoVj9n8pnFvB6ORdJPUM7ZHo/edit?usp=sharing)
* For verbally fluent students in upper elementary and secondary grades, an interview can yield insight regarding a number social communication skills as well as understanding of various social concepts. Here are some helpful examples:
	+ [Child Interview of Social Functioning](https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/Child_Interview_of_Social_Functioning.pdf) (Bellini)
	+ [Sample Student Interview Form](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sjQCU-5Fpvz4jTDLQK8wyprWUKlS3QjV/view?usp=sharing) (Dunn Buron)
	+ Double Interview (Winner)
	+ [TRIAD Social Skills Assessment](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vUD8W0DrJ5X-DCz4PxNIRNDFQsHRMxYJ/view?usp=sharing) (Appendix 3 includes a direct interaction that probes conversation skills, social understanding, and perspective-taking)
	+ Items from [Module 4](https://html1-f.scribdassets.com/85ce3ovt8g6twtfc/images/1-0d4c3d6731.jpg) (Adolescent/Adult with fluent speech) ADOS-2 may be used as an *informal probe* as the ADOS-2 is not intended for distance-based administration or scoring. Items that may assist in structuring a distance-based direct interaction include: 4. Conversation and Reporting, 5. Current Work or School, 6. Social Difficulties or Annoyance, 7. Emotions, 12 Friends, Relationships and Marriage, 14. Plans and Hopes.

**Asynchronous (recorded) unstructured observation*** Ask the parent or caregiver to record their child during routines, play, unstructured activities that involve interaction with siblings, peers, and/or a familiar adult.
	+ For younger children, consider providing the parent or caregiver with a sequence of games, routines, or activities to complete.
	+ Provide parents or caregivers with guidance in advance regarding what you would like to see, as well as technical tips to ensure a high quality video with the child clearly visible and audible throughout the recording.
		- Columbia Regional Program developed handouts that evaluators can provide to parents and caregivers, helping them understand how to structure a video-based observation of their child to elicit communication, social interaction, play and other behaviors of interest.
			* [Activity Guide: Bubbles Play (toddlers/pre-K)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1L2GEE_0HcSnubDvOB1d-jVMjyDlSY9XoKx93mQFcalc/edit?usp=sharing)
			* [Activity Guide: Free Play (pre-K/elementary)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NtzccmCmj3TBnNM9MsD5a96br25BU-if2RjpHt9g-EE/edit?usp=sharing)
			* [Activity Guide: Putting a Puzzle Together (pre-K/elementary)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y4Yl8TxNYC83dXwKupON0KL9dMyJDuR6UGCdzFt1c_Y/edit?usp=sharing)
			* [Activity Guide: Playing with Play Dough (toddlers/pre-K)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Wa4uL_C5QHpf_b494hGycQpuU_rr2Yrp26qfQiYwpx4/edit?usp=sharing)
			* [Activity Guide: Playing with Play Dough (elementary)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pziBZKbPLWm2Na0-pQ-n57-VCRqAU0uhFYZjADsgmrM/edit?usp=sharing)
			* [Activity Guide: Picture Description “That’s Silly” (pre-K/elementary)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KftN_WoOnBcT3XfPSAUVxlvbkiZa7kR3aOJo2UDHNpc/edit?usp=sharing)
			* [Activity Guide: Exploring a Book (pre-K/elementary)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/16WmYsNR6phJ601-3rdnB3eTeLCXStcB8eDIJDE-2eXs/edit?usp=sharing)
			* [Activity Guide: Let’s Play a Game (pre-K/elementary)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lEJvkaRVR3O0bIOP-ehVrZOPdPA3k6vT6ZdgPnlunNs/edit?usp=sharing)
	+ Note that some parents or caregivers may require technical assistance to share video from their phone or other device.
	+ Parents may provide multiple clips two-to-three minutes in length, or a single extended clip (note that longer clips result in larger file sizes and transfer times).

**Asynchronous (recorded) direct interaction*** This is not advised. The spirit of a direct interaction involves the licensed professional knowledgeable of ASD interacting (or guiding interaction) with the child or youth in real-time, dynamically adjusting as the interaction unfolds.

If recorded (asynchronous) video is used for one or more observations, it should be accompanied by at least one real-time (synchronous) distance-based observation/direct interaction (i.e., avoid reliance entirely upon recorded video for the required three observations). |

| **10. Question: What guidance is available for SLPs in completing distance-based social communication assessments (SCAs); a required component of the ASD evaluation?** |
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| Answer: Refer to the ASD Technical Assistance Paper for extended guidance on SCA procedures. Since SLPs typically include structured and unstructured observations as part of their SCA, they are encouraged to reference the guidance in this document on conducting those remotely. In addition, SLPs may rely upon teacher and parent interviews structured using one or more informal questionnaires or checklists available - examples from [Bellini](https://bellinibsr.com/) include:* [Teacher Interview of Social Functioning](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SG2gJ7tCGbT_tAj-Zas37XXSslAFYIgF/view?usp=sharing)
* [Parent Interview of Social Functioning](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S630VS9iXFRj97kNeVg7gVOYGmwHZZKN/view?usp=sharing)
* [Autism Social Skills Profile](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d2cF3yN1UyEYH8ul4gfG8VIoEcSMSFA2/view?usp=sharing)

Standardized rating scales can be completed remotely with little difficulty, providing SLPs with valuable information regarding language and social communication development (e.g., Children’s Communication Checklist - 2, Social Responsiveness Scale - 2).With regard to standardized language testing, there is [some evidence supporting the feasibility](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30565791/) of remotely administered language testing among school-aged students with ASD. Check with test publishers for the availability of online stimulus materials. For example, Pearson provides information on [remote administration of the CELF: 5](https://www.pearsonassessments.com/professional-assessments/digital-solutions/telepractice/telepractice-and-the-celf-5.html). Comprehensive language tests are not particularly sensitive to core social communication features of ASD, but may be helpful in describing levels of receptive and expressive language development - particularly among students with phrase-level speech who exhibit evident language delays. |
| **11. Question: Which Standardized Autism Identification Tools are best suited to distance-based evaluations?** |
| Answer: Consider using one of the behavior rating scales designed specifically to assist with ASD identification including the Autism Spectrum Rating Scale (ASRS), Social Responsiveness Scale - 2 (SRS-2), or Childhood Autism Rating Scale - 2 (CARS-2) among others.  |
| **12. Question: Is it appropriate to ask the child’s teacher from the previous year to complete an ASD behavior rating scale?** |
| Answer: Yes, but with cautions. The teacher from the previous year may possess a wealth of information based upon their many opportunities to observe the student in unstructured social contexts among peers. However, review the rating scale manual to determine if this will deviate from the directions. In the evaluation report, it is important to be transparent regarding procedures and the context necessary to interpret the results. Disclose the degree to which administration deviated from the manual and explain that results should thus be interpreted with caution. Also, do not rule out the current teacher as a source of valuable information. Information from both the current and previous teacher will yield a more complete picture of the student.  |

| **13. Question: Is it appropriate to remotely administer standardized, norm-referenced tests (e.g., cognitive, academic)?** |
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| Answer: While these instruments often provide valuable information to inform an ASD evaluation, these tests are not required components of an ASD evaluation. The Oregon School Psychologists Association (OSPA) provides guidance on this topic in their [Guidance for Special Education Evaluation During COVID-19](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jGOAAg49frxxzDHdCgIA_-lPtTTLIEke/view).  |
| **14. Question: How do we determine adverse impact upon educational performance in a distance learning context?** |
| Answer: Provided that sufficient time has passed for the child to “settle in” to the distance learning being provided, the child can be observed during distance learning to assess ways in which their disability may be impacting their ability to access and participate in instruction. Interview the child’s teacher, asking how the child’s performance compares with peers. Interview parents to assess how the ASD may be impacting attention, motivation, organization, task completion, communication with the teacher and/or peers.Reach out to one or more educators who knew and worked with the child in the previous year during in-person instruction to probe performance in the same areas. Synthesize information from the current and previous year to determine if and how the ASD is adversely impacting education performance. Remember that under IDEA, adverse impact upon education performance encompasses far more than academic skills including social skills, organization, and other functional domains. |
| **15. Question: T****he team completed a distance-based ASD evaluation yet remains unclear or undecided regarding ASD eligibility. What should we do?** |
| Answer: The evaluation team should either (1) gather additional assessment information that may include in-person assessment at an evaluation center (if available); or (2) consider eligibility under a different category (e.g., Developmental Delay, Other Health Impaired) to ensure provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).If the team decides to establish eligibility under a category other than ASD, it is important to ensure the report documents the behavioral characteristics of ASD identified at the time of the evaluation. The team should continue to monitor the student over time. Re-evaluation may be initiated at a later date if concerns persist that ASD may best describe the student. Services are non-categorical: IDEA stipulates that the services and supports included on an IFSP or IEP must be driven by needs of the child, not the eligibility category under which they are served. A child with a DD or OHI eligibility can be provided with the same supports typically associated with ASD (e.g., social narratives, visual schedule/supports, social skills group) if that’s what the team determines the child needs to succeed and access instruction. |

| **16. Question: We set up an evaluation center. How should we decide which children should come in for in-person assessment?** |
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| Answer: Reasons why it may be helpful to bring a child in for in-person evaluation with social distancing and other safety precautions in place:* A distance-based evaluation was attempted but was unsuccessful due to technology or other reasons
* Information that can only be gathered in-person is needed to determine eligibility
* Administration of standardized, norm-referenced tests is required (e.g., cognitive, academic achievement)
 |
| **17. Question: Is it appropriate to administer the ADOS-2 in-person but with masks and related safety measures in place?** |
| Answer: Dr. Catherine Lord co-authored the ADOS-2, and stated that [it is not appropriate](https://www.semel.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/autism/pdf/BOSA%20Training%20Final%20No%20Videos.pdf) to administer the ADOS-2 with a mask on. The [Brief Observation of Symptoms of Autism](https://www.semel.ucla.edu/autism/bosa-training) (BOSA) was developed based on the ADOS-2 and can be used either distance-based or in-person. With the BOSA, parents are provided with toys and prompts to play/interact with their child - the evaluator can be masked as a distance, perhaps behind a clear barrier, to observe.If the team proceeds with an ADOS-2 administration in-person using a clear barrier and/or face mask, social distancing and/or other safety measures it will be important to disclose those measures in the evaluation report - indicating that the results should be interpreted with caution because of the way in which these elements may have impacted the social interaction between child/student and examiner. |
| **18. Question: Are there examples of safety protocols that districts and ESDs are putting in place for their evaluation centers?** |
| Answer: Yes. [Example A](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15QoEcJlKQeawMpyjKvwr_vpLkA41ut5k/view?usp=sharing)[Example B](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eKuJVvFPAIORC4ghipyjez_RGSwkuI2R/view?usp=sharing) |

| **19. Question: What guidance is available on three-year re-evaluations during this time?** |
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| Answer: Due to the present challenges associated with distance-based ASD evaluation, teams are encouraged to re-establish eligibility using previously collected information to the extent possible (i.e., carry forward dates on the new eligibility form from the previous); this is referred to by some as a "file review" or "roll over". It is advised to discuss this with parents, the preference to re-establish eligibility based on previously completed assessments. When "rolling over" the previous eligibility, it is good practice to create a written summary about the child that captures the most current information regarding how ASD continues to impact the individual’s functional and academic performance, their strengths and interests, any behavioral challenges and supports as well as the supports and strategies working well for the student. The ASD TAP subsection on three year re-evaluations includes [a template “Present Profile Summary”](https://docs.google.com/document/d/12hvWSU7xEAVS6bINWnFa6TtipeX087SQvV0OnFi2T-A/edit?usp=sharing) that teams may use or adapt.For eligibilities established prior to 2019, the previous assessment data will either need to be sufficient to meet the new ASD eligibility criteria, or certain components of the ASD evaluation will need to be updated (e.g., social communication assessment, hearing/vision screening). |