
As a general rule, the Board does not permit private outside providers, such as Applied Behavior Analysis (“ABA”) therapists, physical therapists (“PTs”), occupational therapists (“OTs”), and mental health providers, to accompany students on campus during the school day. Students wishing to receive private therapy should do so off campus and outside of school hours.

I. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Watauga County Schools is responsible for providing all special needs students with accommodations, specially designed instruction, related services, supplemental aids, and supports they need to access their educational services. Private providers working with students with special needs shall be permitted to collaborate with school staff.

Parents may invite their private providers to participate in IEP or 504 team meetings, as individuals with knowledge or special expertise about their child, or to provide written recommendations to the school. Parents are also encouraged to provide consent for any private providers to exchange information and records with school staff regarding the child’s services and needs.

On a case-by-case basis, IEP Teams may modify the application of this procedure when deemed necessary to comply with applicable law, accommodate a medically-necessary home-bound educational plan, or accommodate the documented wishes of parents to receive partial services or a modified school day. If a parent provides medical documentation that a student requires early release for a therapy, the district shall follow the same process used for medical appointments.

II. ABA, MEDICAID/PRIVATE INSURANCE COVERAGE, AND IEPs

To be covered by Medicaid or private insurance, clinical ABA services must be prescribed by a licensed professional based on a medical necessity. Generally, the clinical model for ABA services occurs one-on-one with an adult in a structured, controlled environment.

By contrast, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”) requires that students receive a Free and Appropriate Education (“FAPE”) in the Least Restrictive Environment (“LRE”) that provides them with the opportunity to make meaningful progress given their unique circumstances. The fact that a student has a health care provider’s statement that ABA therapy is medically necessary does not mean that ABA is necessary for FAPE in the LRE under the IDEA. School-based behavioral supports focus on functional, social, and academic skills and adapting the environment to help children succeed within the educational setting. An IEP team will consider any physician’s recommendation to determine whether a therapy or other behavior interventions are necessary for the student to receive FAPE in the LRE.

ABA therapy may be considered a related service under an IEP if the services are aligned with the student’s IEP goals and necessary for the student to make meaningful progress based on their unique needs. As with all therapies, however, the key question for a school IEP team is whether a

therapy and/or specific delivery model are necessary for a child to receive FAPE in the LRE. An IEP that provides FAPE in the LRE does not need to include a medically-prescribed therapy. In addition, consideration of any therapy by an IEP Team occurs after the team considers the student's present levels, goals, and any existing SDI, accommodations, and related services. If an IEP team decides that ABA therapy is not necessary for FAPE due to the incorporation of other behavioral methodologies in an IEP, that decision can be reconsidered by the IEP team in the future based on student outcomes.

If ABA therapy is determined to be necessary for the provision of FAPE, the district will first consider whether these services can be provided by district staff with the appropriate training prior to considering whether private providers are necessary.

Adopted: June 22, 2026