

**BEFORE THE NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STATE OF NEBRASKA**

**FRANKLIN COUNTY SCHOOL)
DISTRICT NO. 31-0506, commonly)
Known as FRANKLIN PUBLIC)
SCHOOLS, 1001 M Street)
Franklin, NE 68939)**

CASE NO. 20-02 SE

Petitioner,)

**FINDINGS OF FACT,
CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND
ORDER**

vs.)

Respondent.)

This case was heard on June 15, 2020, at Franklin Public Schools, 1001 M St., Franklin, NE 68939. Mona (Molly) Burton, the duly qualified and appointed Fair Hearing Officer, presided. Petitioner, Franklin County School District No. 31-0506, commonly known as Franklin Public Schools, was represented by attorneys, Karen Haase and Jordan Johnson. Respondent, _____ was present. Respondent _____ was not present. The hearing was recorded by Doris Burby, Freelance Court Reporter. The case was adjourned on June 15, 2020, the record closed, written arguments scheduled, and the case taken under advisement. The parties subsequently stipulated to an extension of the hearing officer’s decision to August 1, 2020.

Jurisdiction is premised upon NAC Title 92 Ch. 55, § 005.01, and the Nebraska Special Education Act, *Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-1110 et. seq.*, which confers on the hearing officer exclusive original jurisdiction of this case.

Petitioner, Franklin Public Schools (FPS) filed a Petition requesting a due process hearing to determine whether it appropriately denied Respondents' request for an Independent Education Evaluation (IEE) at public expense. (Ex. 21) Respondents answered the Petition. (Ex. 22)

The following witnesses testified at the hearing:

- Respondent
- Ariel Neumeyer, School Psychologist for Education Service Unit 11 (ESU 11). Ms. Neumeyer has a Bachelor's Degree in psychology and an education specialist degree in school psychology. (46:18-19) Ms. Neumeyer attended a Ziggurat model training specializing in autism characteristics for students and an oppositional defiant and aggressive behavior training for children and adolescents. (47:11-16) Ms. Neumeyer has performed around 400 psychoeducational testing on students. (47:24-48:1)
 - Lesa Clifford, Speech Language Pathologist for ESU 11. Ms. Clifford is qualified to analyze students from birth to age 21. (73:24-74:1)
 - Piper Hollman, Occupational Therapist for ESU 11. Ms. Hollman received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology and Preoccupational Therapy and Master of Arts Degree in Occupational Therapy. (92:7-11)
 - Katie James, Special Education Teacher for FPS. Ms. Katie James has a Bachelor's Degree in Early Education Unified and a Master's Degree in Special Education. (121:25-122:2) Ms. Katie James is qualified to teach special education to students in kindergarten through third grade. (122:2-4)
 - Cortney James, Preschool Teacher for FPS. Ms. Cortney James has a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Education and Human Services and a Master's Degree in Education. (148:11-12)

Exhibits 1 through 32 were received without objection.

FINDINGS OF FACT

STIPULATED FACTS:

The parties stipulated to the following facts (Ex. 23):

1. Petitioner is a public school district accredited by the Nebraska Department of Education. Pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and Title 92, Chapter 51 of the Nebraska Administrative Code (Rule 51) and Title 92, Chapter 52 of the Nebraska Administrative Code (Rule 52) Petitioner serves as the Local Education Agency (LEA) for (Student).
2. Respondents
3. has not been verified as a student with a disability under Rule 51 or Rule 52.
4. In September of 2019, Petitioner requested and received consent from Respondents to initiate the Student's initial evaluation to determine whether the Student was eligible for services under Rule 51 and Rule 52 as a child with a disability.
5. On or about November 18, 2019, a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) convened for the Student's initial evaluation. The team considered and utilized the data from the following assessments conducted by the Petitioner, in addition to relevant information from the Student's teachers, parents, and other individuals who are familiar with the Student. The team further considered the Report and Recommendations completed by Dr. Andrew Casper, MD, provided by Respondents. The team also considered the Autism Assessment report completed by Dr. Nancy Foster, Ph.D. Based on all of this information, the MDT concluded that the Student was not eligible for IDEA services. Respondent indicated agreement with the team's decision at that time.

6. On or about November 18, 2019, Petitioner provided Respondents prior written notice of Petitioner's determination that the Student was ineligible for IDEA services.
7. On or about December 10, 2019, Petitioner received correspondence from the respondent in which the Respondent requested an Independent Educational Evaluation for
8. In order to consider this request, Petitioner sought clarification regarding the grounds upon which the Respondents objected to Petitioner's evaluation in correspondence provided on December 11, 2019. Petitioner's communication was consistent with 92 NAC 51 § 006.07F.
9. On or about December 11, 2019, Petitioner received correspondence from the Respondents responsive to the request for clarification described in Paragraph 11. Based upon the communications with the Respondents, Petitioner reasonably interpreted Respondent's request as seeking an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at public expense.
10. On or about January 9, 2020, Petitioner provided Respondent the policy and criteria applicable to IEEs, consistent with 92 NAC 51 § 006.07B.
11. On January 9, 2020, Petitioner provided Respondent prior written notice of Petitioner's decision to deny the request for a publicly funded IEE. In that notice, Petitioner informed the Respondent that it denied the request because Petitioner fully and appropriately assessed the Student in all areas related to suspected disability in determining whether the Student was eligible for services under the IDEA. Further, Petitioner noted its review of the evaluative data demonstrated the district's evaluation was appropriate as it provided a comprehensive basis for the MDT team to make such a determination.
12. In early 2019, Dr. Nancy Foster, Ph.D. evaluated at the request and expense of the Respondents. Dr. Foster summarized the results of her evaluation in a report dated February 5,

2019. This report was subsequently shared with the School District by the Respondents. Dr. Nancy Foster conducted the following assessments as part of her evaluation:

- a. Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS-III);
- b. Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-III);
- c. Autism Spectrum Rating Scales (ASRS);
- d. Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS-II)

13. Petitioner's evaluation of _____ included the following formal assessments:

- a. Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Fourth Edition (WPPSI-IV) conducted by Ariel Neumeyer, Ed.S.;
- b. Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning- Fourth Edition (DIAL-4) completed by school staff and the Respondents;
- c. Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals- Preschool-Second Edition (CELF-P2) conducted by Lesa Clifford, M.S. CCC-SLP;
- d. Miller Function and Participation Scales (M-FUN) conducted by Piper Hollman, M.S. OTR/L.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS OF FACT:

After hearing and reviewing the evidence, the hearing officer makes the additional findings of fact:

14. _____ (8:25-9:2)
15. _____ pediatrician is Dr. Andrew Casper. (10:10-11) Dr. Casper referred _____ to the Kearney Behavioral Clinic and Family Physical Therapy. (10:14-20)
16. Respondent reported concerns that _____ was aggressive, had sensory food issues, could not regulate _____ emotions, had issues with fine motor skills and had speech issues. (11:10-12; 14:8-

- 10; 15:9-11; 16:3-5; 16:6-10) would throw toys and have tantrums at home. (14:3-4) would pull Respondent's hair as well as bite, kick, scratch and hit her. (15:6—8; 15:16-18)
17. On September 20, 2019, Respondent requested FPS evaluate (Ex. 1) (18:14-21)
18. FPS tested in the areas of: intellectual processing, perceptual and motor skills, social and emotional skills, speech and language skills and conducted a classroom observation based on the reported concerns of ability level, academic skills, language skills, fine and gross motor skills, and social-emotional skills. (12:1-14) (Ex. 3 at 3)
19. Rule 51 recognizes 13 disability categories. (51:18-20) To receive specialized instruction, a student must verify in one of the 13 categories and the disability must demonstrate an adverse educational impact necessitating special education services. (50:19-23; 51:18-22; 65:12-22)
20. Ms. Neumeyer learned about classroom performance by interviewing teacher and the paraprofessionals assigned to the class. (48:24-49:2) Had any concerns been raised, she would have conducted her own classroom observation. (49:8-17; 67:13-18)
21. Ms. Neumeyer reviewed the private assessments provided by the Respondents including reports from Dr. Casper and Dr. Foster. (52:8-21; 53:5-8; 53:12-14)
22. Dr. Foster evaluated to determine if met the criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder. "Based on information obtained through interviews with and [Respondent], a review of records, standardized measures, and direct observation," Dr. Foster found that did not meet the criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder. (Ex. 18 at 7)
23. After reviewing the private assessments, Ms. Neumeyer did not have a concern that was on the autism spectrum. (53:15-18)
24. Ms. Neumeyer did not review progress notes from Mental Health Practitioner as she did not have access to the documents. (54:13-19) (Ex. 26)

25. Ms. Neumeyer did not review an Occupational Therapy (OT) Re-Examination Addendum as the MDT did not have access to this report prior to the meeting. (55:3-8) (Ex. 28)
26. Ms. Neumeyer did not review April 24, 2020, reports from Dr. Casper because the report was generated after the MDT meeting. (55:9-15; 55:19-25; 56:1-7) (Ex. 29) (Ex 30) (Ex. 31) (Ex. 32)
27. Ms. Neumeyer administered the WPPSI-IV which measures a student's problem solving and reasoning skills in several different areas including verbal information, analyzing visual information and problem solving. (56:19-21; 57:11-13) The test provides a student's full scale IQ or the best estimate. (57:13-15)
28. WPPSI-IV is a norm-referenced assessment, meaning score can be compared to other students age. (57:22-24) All trained professionals give this test the same way. (57:24-58:1)
29. performed in the average range in all areas and level of functioning was measured in the average range of ability. (58:4-6) (Ex. 3 at 7)
30. Ms. Neumeyer observed to be a willing participant as well as talkative, friendly and attentive. (58:9-12)
31. Ms. Neumeyer indicated that taking breaks during assessments for a student age is normal. (58:23-59:4)
32. Based on her own testing and a review of the provided information, Ms. Neumeyer opined that did not verify in any of the 13 disability categories and did need specialized instruction. (51:24-52:1; 59:9-16)
33. Ms. Clifford testified that she evaluates and treats communication disorders within a school setting. (73:10-12)
34. Speech Language can be a related service, but it is also one of the 13 disability categories. (140:1-3) did not meet the criteria for the speech language category. (60:4-6)

35. Ms. Clifford evaluated because of Respondent's request. School staff neither expressed concerns nor suggested an evaluation of (75:20-76:6)
36. Ms. Clifford chose not to perform an articulation assessment because was intelligible when spoken to and mispronunciation of R's and L's is common for a (76:25-78:5)
37. In accordance with testing protocols, Ms. Clifford administered the CELF-P2, a test that she is trained and qualified to give. (79:6-11) This test is widely used, is normed on over 1500 children and examines a child's ability to understand spoken language as well the ability to verbally express himself/herself. (79:13-17; 80:16-17)
38. scores on the CELF-P2 were within the average range. (81:9-11)
39. needed to be redirected during the test. Ms. Clifford testified that this is normal. (81:19-21; 82:1-14)
40. Based on her evaluation as well as the information provided to and considered by the MDT, Ms. Clifford did not believe that demonstrated a need for special education services. (84:10-15)
41. Ms. Holman helps students with school related tasks. (91:20-22) She assesses a student's fine motor skills and, at times, a student's gross motor skills, though gross motor skills is more in the physical therapy purview. (93:14-20)
42. Occupational Therapy is a related service. A child must first be verified as meeting one of the 13 verification criteria in order to receive OT services. (59:22-60:3; 94:17-24)
43. As part of her evaluation, Ms. Holman observed in classroom and informally reviewed handwriting. (98:5-14)
44. Ms. Holman observed no concerning behaviors. (98:15-18)

45. Ms. Holman administered the M-FUN test. (98:22-24) This test is a norm and criteria reference test. [redacted] was compared to other students [redacted] age. (99:18-20). This test is standardized. (99:20-21)
46. Ms. Holman did not assess [redacted] gross motor skills because [redacted] teacher did not raise gross motor skills as an area of concern. (100:12-15) Ms. Holman's observation of [redacted] did not indicate a need for assessment in this area. (100:16-19)
47. Ms. Holman's testing results showed that [redacted] visual motor and fine motor skills were appropriate for [redacted] age. (100:20-24) Ms. Holman additionally consulted with [redacted] teacher who reported no concerns with [redacted] fine motor skills. (104:22-105:9)
48. Ms. Holman indicated that it is appropriate for a student [redacted] age to take breaks during a test. (111:3-15)
49. Ms. Holman did not have access to [redacted] private OT Re-Examination when the MDT met to determine [redacted] needs. (105:15-20) (Ex. 28) This report did not change Ms. Holman's findings because the concerns raised in the report were not seen in the school. (106:10-17; 111:22-112:1)
50. Ms. Katie James administered the DIAL developmental indicator test, a test given to children [redacted] age. (126:11-17)
51. [redacted] scored in the average range and did not demonstrate a need for special education or related services. (125:23-24; 131:15-19)
52. During the testing, Ms. Katie James observed no indication that [redacted] needed further language or behavioral testing. (130:9-131:4) Ms. James found no further evaluations were necessary to determine [redacted] educational needs. (131:20-23)

53. Ms. Cortney James is trained to assess preschool students' academic, social, behavioral, physical, language, and cognitive functioning using the GOLD data observation-based method. (152:21-153:7)
54. Neither Ms. Cortney James nor the two paraprofessionals in her classroom observed any concerns warranting a referral for a special education evaluation. (150:4-16)
55. During the 14 hours Ms. Cortney James spent per week with _____ she was able to observe social, physical and academic performance. (150:21-23). _____ functioned as an average year old in her classroom. (151:4-6) _____ motor skills were typical. (152:2-4)
56. The GOLD data indicated that _____ did not need special education services or further evaluation. (156:10-15) _____ met or exceeded expectation in all but one observed objectives. (155:9-9 (Ex. 11))
57. Ms. Cortney James was aware of Respondent's concerns about aggression and playing rough. (164:16-165:4) Neither Ms. Cortney James nor the paraprofessionals observed _____ behave in this manner. (165:12-23)
58. Ms. Cortney James reviewed the documents Respondent provided after the MDT decision. (167:18-20). The new information did not change Ms. Cortney James's opinion regarding need for special education services. (167:21-23)
59. The MDT concluded that _____ did not qualify for special education services due to commensurate scores that fell within the average range on cognitive ability, academic, language, and fine and gross motor skills assessments. (Ex. 3 at 3) _____ performed above average on each test FPS staff administered. (Ex. 13)
60. After the MDT met and concluded _____ did not qualify for special education services, _____ was diagnosed with ADHD. (182:14-19) Nothing in the evaluations or Ms. Cortney James's

observation indicated that this diagnosis negatively affected educational performance. (145:20-146:1; 174:12-20)

61. Respondent requested an IEE because FPS did not test articulation or gross motor skills. Respondent additionally questioned whether a formal classroom observation should have been completed. (182:6-13) 21. Respondent questioned the evaluation because she obtained a private OT evaluation indicating issues with fine and gross motor skills as well as the redirection and breaks offered to during the testing. (39:22-24) (Ex. 7)

62. In order to qualify for an IEE, there must be an error in the school district's evaluation. (37:15-18)

CONTESTED ISSUES

The parties further agreed that, with regard to the evaluation of conducted by the FPS between September and November 2019, the following constitute the contested issues in this matter which remain for the Hearing Officer's determination:

- 1). Whether the FPS assessed using a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about including information provided by the parent, and information related to enabling to be involved in and progress in the general education curriculum.
- 2). Whether the School District assessed in all areas related to suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.
- 3). Whether the School District's evaluation of was sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which had previously been classified.

4). Whether the school district, in interpreting evaluation data for the purpose of determining if is a child with a disability, correctly administered assessments in the attainment of evaluation data.

5). Whether each of the assessments and other evaluation materials used by the School District to assess were provided and administered in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally.

6). Whether each of the assessments and other evaluation materials used by the School District to assess were used for purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

BURDEN OF PROOF:

63. IDEA and Rule 51 of the Nebraska Department of Education allow for publicly funded IEEs if the parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the school district, unless (1) the district demonstrates in a due process hearing that its own evaluation of the child was appropriate; or (2) the district demonstrates in a due process hearing that the evaluation obtained by the parents did not meet district criteria. 92 NAC § 51 006.07(D).

64. The burden of proof in a due process hearing routinely rests on the Petitioner. Accordingly, the burden in this case is on FPS to show by a preponderance of the evidence, that it's evaluation of satisfied IDEA's requirements and procedures. *See Schaffer ex rel. Schaffer v. Weast*, 546 U.S. 49, 52 (2005).

65. If the school district successfully proves that its own evaluation was appropriate, a parent is not entitled to an IEE at public expense. 34 C.F.R. § 300.502(b)(3).

Contested Issue 1: Whether FPS assessed using a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about including information provided by the parent, and information related to enabling to be involved in and progress in the general education curriculum.

66. School districts and approved cooperatives must ensure a variety of assessment tools and strategies are used to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the child, including information provided by the parent, and information related to enabling the child to be involved in and progress in the general education curriculum. 92 NAC 51 § 006.02C5.
67. The parties stipulated and the evidence establishes, that FPS performed the following evaluations: WPPSI-IV, DIAL-4, CELF-P2 and M-FUN.
68. FPS tested in the areas of: intellectual processing, perceptual and motor skills, social and emotional skills, speech and language skills and conducted a classroom observation.
69. The parties further stipulated and the evidence establishes that the MDT considered information provided by the Respondents including reports and documents from Dr. Foster and Dr. Casper.
70. FPS's witnesses opined that the evaluation complied with 92 NAC 51 § 006.02C5. (61:14-17; 87:3-8; 113:20-23; 137:18-24; 171:12-18) This testimony was credible.
71. Respondent agreed that FPS used a variety of assessment tools and considered information provided by Respondent. (41:10-13)
72. This hearing officer agrees with FPS's witnesses and finds that FPS's evaluation utilized a variety of assessment tools, included relevant functional, developmental and academic information and incorporated information from Respondents.

Contested Issue 2: Whether the School District assessed _____ in all areas related to _____ suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.

73. School districts and approved cooperatives must ensure the child is assessed in all areas related to the *suspected* disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities. 92 NAC 51 § 006.02C10 (emphasis provided).

74. Child with a disability means a child who has been verified as a child with autism, a behavior disorder (herein referred to as emotional disturbance), deaf-blindness, a developmental delay, a hearing impairment including deafness, an intellectual disability, multiple impairment, an orthopedic impairment, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, a speech-language impairment, a traumatic brain injury or a visual impairment including blindness, *who because of this impairment needs special education and related services*. 92 NAC 51 § 003.08 (emphasis provided). *See also*, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 (3)(A).

75. FPS tested _____ in the areas of: intellectual processing, perceptual and motor skills, social and emotional skills, speech and language skills and conducted a classroom observation.

76. Respondents did not object to the areas FPS tested, but expressed additional concerns with _____ articulation and gross motor skills.

77. FPS did not assess _____ articulation or gross motor skills because based on observations of _____ teacher, paraprofessionals and MDT members who tested _____ articulation and gross motors skills were not indicated areas of suspected disability. *See e.g., Wiesenberg v. Bd. of Educ. of Salt Lake City Sch. Dist.*, 181 F. Supp. 2d 1307, `1310-11 (D. Utah 2002) (concerning its child-

find duty, the district must have reason to suspect a disability, and reason to suspect that special education services may be needed to address the disability).

78. Further, OT is a related service offered to a student who has been verified under one of the 13 disability categories. The potential need for OT alone, cannot be the sole basis for special education services. 92 NAC 51 § 003.49.

79. Assuming arguendo that testing indicated gross motor skills deficits, there was no adverse educational impact observed.

80. While speech language impairment is both a verification category and a related service, articulation was not a suspected disability.

81. The CELF-P2 showed that performed in the average range for communication skills.

82. FPS witnesses testified that all areas of suspected disability were evaluated. (87:10-15; 113:24-114:1; 137:25-138:5; 171:19-24) FPS witnesses stated that further evaluations were not warranted. This testimony was credible.

83. FPS met its burden indicating that all areas related to suspected disability were assessed.

Contested Issue 3: Whether the School District's evaluation of was sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which had previously been classified.

84. School districts and approved cooperatives must ensure in evaluating each child with a disability under Section 006, the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child's special education and related services needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the child has been classified. 92 NAC 51 § 006.C11

85. Again, FPS tested in the areas of: intellectual processing, perceptual and motor skills, social and emotional skills, speech and language skills and conducted a classroom observation.

86. The parties further stipulated and the evidence establishes that the MDT considered information provided by the Respondents including reports and documents from Dr. Foster and Dr. Casper.

87. As explained above, FPS did not assess articulation and gross motor skills because FPS staff observations did not indicate that these areas were suspected disabilities.

88. While Respondents provided reports to the MDT team members after the MDT made its decision, team members advised that the reports did not change their opinion that did not qualify for special education services.

89. Respondent questioned whether a classroom observation apart from Ms. Courtney James's observations should have been employed in the evaluation. Relying on the observations of Ms. Courtney James and the assigned classroom paraprofessionals who witness behaviors on a daily basis, Ms. Neumeier did not conduct her own classroom observation because no inconsistencies were reported. This did not impact the validity of Ms. Neumeier's assessments. (49:18-22)

90. FPS's witnesses opined that the evaluation complied with 92 NAC 51 § 006.C11. (61:14-17; 86:16-20; 114:2-6; 138:6-10; 171:25-172:4) This testimony was credible.

91. FPS met its burden establishing that its evaluation was sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of special education and related service needs.

Contested Issues 4, 5 and 6: Whether the school district, correctly administered assessments in the attainment of evaluation data in the form most likely to yield accurate information and used for purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable.

92. FPS's witnesses testified that the assessments utilized were administered according to protocols. (87:21-88:9; 113:2-5; 114:7-18; 138:16-139-25; 172:5-19)

93. Respondent agreed that FPS staff correctly administered the assessments. (42:6-16)

94. The only objection raised by Respondent with the testing was that _____ at times, needed to take a break during the assessment. FPS witnesses indicated that it is normal for a student _____, age to need a break.

95. Nothing in the record suggests or demonstrates that FPS staff incorrectly administered, interpreted or otherwise applied the assessments or assessment results.

96. FPS witnesses testified that its evaluation conformed with Rule 51. (88:10-13; 114:19-22; 139:1-4; 172:20-23)

97. FPS met its burden under Contested Issues 4, 5 and 6.

CONCLUSION

98. FPS met its burden that its evaluation of _____ was appropriate. Respondents are not entitled to an IEE at public expense.

IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED, AS FOLLOWS:

1. Petitioner's special education petition is sustained.
2. Petitioner is not obligated to grant Respondents' request for an Independent Education Evaluation at public expense.

DATED July 31, 2020

By: _____

Mona (Molly) L. Burton, #21696 Hearing Officer

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned does hereby certify that a true and correct copy of the above and foregoing was duly served via certified mail return receipt requested on the 31st day of July 2020.

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