

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES (SLD).

Definition

(1) Specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional or behavioral disorders, environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage. [34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(10)]

(2) The child with a specific learning disability has one or more serious academic deficiencies and does not achieve adequately according to age to meet grade level standards. These achievement deficiencies must be directly related to a pervasive processing deficit and to the child's response to scientific, research-based interventions. The nature of the deficit(s) is such that classroom performance is not correctable without specialized techniques that are fundamentally different from those available in the general education classroom, basic remedial/tutorial approaches, or other compensatory programs. This is clearly documented by the child's response to instruction as demonstrated by a review of the progress monitoring available in general education and Student Support Team (SST) intervention plans as supported by work samples and classroom observations. The child's need for academic support alone is not sufficient for eligibility and does not override the other established requirements for determining eligibility.

Exclusionary Factors

(1) A child must not be determined to be a child with a specific learning disability if the determinant factor for that determination is:

- a. Lack of appropriate instruction in reading, to include the essential components of reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension);
- b. Lack of appropriate instruction in math;
- c. Lack of appropriate instruction in writing;
- d. Limited English proficiency;
- e. Visual, hearing or motor disability;
- f. Intellectual disabilities;
- g. Emotional disturbances;
- h. Cultural factors;
- i. Environmental or economic disadvantage; or
- j. Atypical educational history (such as irregular school attendance or attendance at multiple schools) [See 34 C.F.R. § 300.309(a)(3)]

Required Data Collection

(1) In order to determine the existence of Specific Learning Disability, the group must summarize the multiple sources of evidence to conclude that the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, state-approved grade level standards and intellectual development. Ultimately, specific learning disability is determined through professional judgment using multiple supporting evidences that must include:

- (a) Data is collected and considered prior to conducting a formal evaluation for special education:
 - (i) At least two current (within twelve months) assessments such as the results of the CRCT, norm-referenced achievement tests or benchmarks indicating performance that does not meet expectations for grade level standards;
 - (ii) Information from the teacher related to routine classroom instruction and monitoring of the child's performance. The report must document the child's academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty.
- (b) Supplementary instruction is provided:
 - (i) that lasts for a minimum of 12 weeks;
 - (ii) At least four data collections of progress monitoring occur during the twelve weeks;
 - (iii) the strategies used and the progress monitoring results are presented to the parents at regular intervals
- (c) Any educationally relevant medical findings that would impact achievement.

(2) After consent is received from the parents for a comprehensive evaluation for special education determination the following must occur:

- a. An observation by a required group member;
- b. Documentation that the determination is not primarily due to any of the exclusionary factors;
- c. Current analyzed classroom work samples indicating below level performance as compared to the classroom normative sample; and
- d. Documentation of a pattern of strength and weaknesses in performance and/or achievement in relation to age and grade level standards must include:
 - (i) A comprehensive assessment of intellectual development designed to assess specific measures of processing skills that may contribute to the area of academic weakness. This assessment must be current for the academic school year and
 - (ii) The current school year's Response to Intervention data based documentation required prior to referral indicating the lack of progress toward the attainment of grade level standards.
 - (iii) As appropriate, a language assessment as part of additional processing batteries may be included.

Eligibility Determination

(1) The child who is eligible for services under the category of specific learning disability must exhibit the following characteristics: a primary deficit in basic psychological processes and secondary underachievement in one or more of the eight areas along with documentation of the lack of response to instructional intervention as supported by on-going progress monitoring.

(2) Deficits in basic psychological processes typically include problems in attending, discrimination/perception, organization, short-term memory, long-term memory, conceptualization/reasoning, executive functioning, processing speed, and phonological deficits. Once a deficit in basic psychological processes is documented, there shall be evidence that the processing deficit has impaired the child's mastery of the academic tasks required in the regular curriculum. Though there may exist a pattern of strengths and weaknesses, evidence must be included documenting that the processing deficits are relevant to the child's academic underachievement as determined by appropriate assessments that are provided to the child in his/her native language. Though a child may be performing below age or state approved grade level standards, the results of progress monitoring must indicate that the child is not making the expected progress toward established benchmarks. This is indicated by comparing the child's rate of progress toward attainment of grade level standards.

(3) Underachievement exists when the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weakness in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, state-approved grade level standards and intellectual development and when a child does not achieve adequately toward attainment of grade level standards in one or more of the following areas:

- (a) Oral expression- use of spoken language to communicate ideas;
- (b) Listening comprehension-ability to understand spoken language at a level commensurate with the child's age and ability levels;
- (c) Written expression - ability to communicate ideas effectively in writing with appropriate language;
- (d) Basic reading skills-ability to use sound/symbol associations to learn phonics in order to comprehend the text;
- (e) Reading comprehension-ability to understand the meaning of written language based in child's native language;
- (f) Reading Fluency Skills- the ability to read and process a text with appropriate rate and accuracy;
- (g) Mathematics calculation-ability to process numerical symbols to derive results, including, but not limited to, spatial awareness of symbol placement and choice of sequence algorithms for operations required; and
- (h) Mathematical problem solving -ability to understand logical relationships between mathematical concepts and operations, including, but not limited to, correct sequencing and spatial/symbolic representation.

(4) Progress monitoring includes the data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting child progress during instruction. When reviewing progress monitoring data, those students that exhibit a positive response to the research validated instruction being provided by general education cannot be considered as having a specific learning disability even though they may show deficits on achievement tests in the specified areas. In addition, children whose achievement in classroom academics indicates performance that is commensurate with pervasive weaknesses that are not indicative of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses may not be considered as having a specific learning disability.

(5) One group member responsible for determining specific learning disability must conduct an observation of the child's academic performance in the regular classroom after the child has been referred for an evaluation and parental consent for special education evaluation is obtained. The observation of the child is conducted in the learning environment, including the regular classroom setting, to document the child's academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty. The

observation must include information from the routine classroom instruction and monitoring of the child's performance.

The SLD Eligibility Group

(1) The determination of whether a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is a child with a disability must be made by the child's parents and a team of qualified professionals that must include:

- (a) The child's regular teacher; or if the child does not have a regular teacher, a regular classroom teacher qualified to teach a child of his or her age;
- (b) A highly qualified certified special education teacher; and
- (c) A minimum of one other professional qualified to conduct individual diagnostic assessments in the areas of speech and language, academic achievement, intellectual development, or social-emotional development and interpret assessment and intervention data (such as school psychologist, reading teacher, or educational therapist). Determination of the required group member should be based on the data being reviewed and the child's individual needs.

(2) Each group member must certify in writing whether the report reflects the member's conclusions. If it does not reflect the member's conclusion, the group member must submit a separate statement presenting the member's conclusions.