
Standards for Special Education Evaluation & Eligibility

The Background:

The last overall review of disability category definitions, guidelines, and standards was conducted in 2008. A current review was requested by the TN Department of Education Special Populations Division to address updates related to disability disorders and assessment practices that have occurred in the past eight years. Pursuant to Tennessee Rules & Regulations, Chapter 0520-01-09-.11, Rules for Special Education Programs and Services, a task force was developed to address disability categories. The multidisciplinary state-wide task force consisted of special education supervisors, school psychologists, and speech and language pathologists as well as representatives of parents/advocates, vision specialists, hearing specialists, preschool specialists, gifted specialists, and the Tennessee Department of Education (i.e., the Speech, Language, & Autism Coordinator, Assistant General Counsel for Special Education, IDEA Coordinator, and Director of Special Education Eligibility).

The initial task force meeting was convened on March 15, 2016, for the purpose of determining whether the disability definitions, guidelines, and standards should be amended. After identifying possible needs, the task force created committees to research and recommend changes for each indicated category. Recommendations were provided to the Advisory Council in April 2016. They were also sent to stakeholder groups (i.e., Tennessee Association of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists, Tennessee Association of School Psychologists, TN-Support and Training for Exceptional Parents/ Tennessee Disability Coalition on Education, and Tennessee Association for the Gifted) for feedback. Further recommended revisions were made after reviewing all feedback with task force committee groups for each disability.

Public comment on the materials approved through first reading was obtained through a public hearing in addition to received written comments. The task force met and reviewed comments, identified themes from the comments, discussed concerns, and made additional revisions. Proposed changes were reviewed with the Students with Disability Advisory Council, and they approved moving forward with revisions. The following list is a summary of the changes made since first reading (page numbers refer to the tracked-changes version of the document):

- **Autism (page 1-2):** Evaluation procedural changes related to communication assessments, sensory, and adaptive behaviors for clarity of needed components. Evaluation participant changes were made to adjust who is required and who are additional participants as needed. Speech Language Teachers were removed as they are not licensed to evaluate.
- **Developmental Delay (pages 7-8):** Evaluation participant changes to generalize needed educational professionals rather than separate out early childhood specialists based on age bands.

- **Emotional Disturbance (pages 9-10):** Rewording of language to mirror federal regulations (Change from January 2017 final read item).
- **Intellectually Gifted (pages 14-16; Attached Assessment Matrix):** Evaluation procedure changes related to the cognitive assessment including additional considerations when assessing underrepresented youth and consideration of the standard error of measurement at the 90th percent confidence interval. Revisions to the assessment matrix (referenced in the standards) to include standard changes and updated testing materials.
- **Orthopedic Impairment (pages 20):** Evaluation procedure revisions made to the example lists of adaptive behaviors measured.
- **Other Health Impairment (pages 21-22):** Evaluation procedure revisions move an assessment area (social emotional development) into the list of informal/formal assessments for clarity.
- **Specific Learning Disability (page 23):** Evaluation procedure reworded for clarity only in regards to observational data to reduce chances of misinterpretation.
- **Speech or Language Impairment (pages 26-28):** Evaluation procedure revisions to include clarification of language evaluation components and articulation evaluation components. Evaluation participants revised to remove Speech Language Teacher as they are not licensed to evaluate.

The Fiscal Analysis Impact:

T.C.A. § 49-1-212 requires that the Department prepare a fiscal analysis of any policy, rule or regulation proposed to the State Board of Education. This item has no financial impact on an LEA.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends adoption of this item on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.