



SPECIAL EDUCATION

FAQ

Intellectual Disabilities FAQ

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Definition and General Requirement

1. What is the definition of intellectual disability?

Intellectual disability means significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects the child's educational performance.

2. What are the disability criteria used to determine if a student can be identified as having an intellectual disability?

There are three criteria that are used when determining if a student meets the criteria for intellectual disability:

Intellectual functioning - A student has a score of 2 or more standard deviations below the mean on an individually administered intelligence test which takes into account the child's mode of communication and is developed to assess intellectual functioning using this mode. More than one intelligence test may be used to produce a comprehensive result.

Adaptive behavior - A student has significant limitations in adaptive behavior that are demonstrated by a standard score of 2 or more standard deviations below the mean on standardized or nationally-normed measures, as measured by comprehensive, individual assessments that include interviews of the parents, tests, and observations of the student in adaptive behavior relevant to the student's age, including at least one of the following: conceptual skills, social adaptive skills, practical adaptive skills, an overall composite score on a standardized measure of conceptual, social and practical skills.

Educational performance - A student is age 3 through 5 and has a standard score of 2 or more standard deviations below the mean on standardized or nationally-normed measures, as measured by comprehensive, individual assessments in the following areas: language development and communication; cognition and general knowledge. A student is age 6 through 21 and has a standard score of 2 or more standard deviations below the mean on standardized or nationally normed measures, as measured by comprehensive, individual assessments in the following areas: written language, reading and mathematics. When it is determined that reliable and valid assessment results are not possible due to the student's functioning level or age, a standardized developmental scale or a body of evidence including informal measures shall be used to assess the child's education performance.

3. Is there an age requirement for initially identifying students as having an intellectual disability?

Preschool students, age 3 through 5 can be found to meet the criteria for intellectual disability. Students over the age of 21 would not meet initial disability category criteria due to the definition of intellectual disability, in which it states that the intellectual disability is “manifested during the developmental period” which is prior to age 22.

Initial Special Education Evaluation

Criteria – Intellectual Functioning

4. What does the language, “manifested during the developmental period” mean?

This statement refers to the period during which intellectual disability first originates. As defined, the age of onset is prior to age 22 (the developmental period) as stated in the 12th Edition of the AAIDD Definition Manual on pages 1 and 124.

5. How does the IEP team demonstrate that the student’s intellectual functioning is two or more standard deviations below the mean if they are unable to obtain a valid cognitive assessment standard score?

IEP teams are required to determine “if the student has a standard score of 2 or more standard deviations below the mean on at least one individually administered intelligence test that takes into account the student’s mode of communication and is developed to assess intellectual functioning using this mode.” The IEP team is also responsible for ensuring that standardized assessments are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis. In circumstances where the IEP team is unable to obtain standardized results due to the student’s mode of communication (including expressive, receptive and non-verbal communication as well as their preferred language) or their racial or cultural background, the IEP team will need to use a body of evidence to determine the student’s level of intellectual functioning. This may be achieved using a combination of multiple standardized cognitive assessments, work samples, standardized developmental rating scales, and observation. For additional details and information on assessing cognitive abilities when valid standard scores are unable to be obtained, please refer to: [Guidance and Worksheet for Obtaining a Valid Cognitive Abilities Assessment](#).

Using the information from that worksheet, the IEP team should document the decision to not conduct at least one standardized intelligence test. This can be done using the “NOTICE AND CONSENT REGARDING NEED TO

Criteria - Adaptive

6. **Must direct observations of the child in the home setting be conducted by an IEP team member other than the child’s parent or caregiver since many of the adaptive skills can only be seen in the home setting and would therefore corroborate the interview findings?**

IEP team members are not prohibited from conducting observations in the home environment and may choose to do so in collaboration with the parents or caregivers. The measurement of adaptive behavior is typically based on raters’ observations of the child’s behavior and skills in a variety of settings, including their classroom, school, home, and neighborhood or community by trained personnel. Because it is impractical for one person to observe a child in all of the key environments, and in order to mitigate the impact of implicit or explicit biases of any individual IEP team members, measurement of adaptive behavior should depend on the feedback from a number of people who interact with a child in different environments. Information about a child’s adaptive behavior skills in the home environment should be gathered from parents using a formal adaptive behavior assessment rating scale. IEP teams should strive to gather data from a variety of sources using a variety of tools including rating scales, observations, and interviews.

7. **What observable and measurable behaviors or skills make up the conceptual, social, and practical adaptive functioning domains?**

According to the AAIDD manual, the ten adaptive behavior skills have been incorporated into three adaptive behavioral areas. They are as follows:

Conceptual skills: literacy; self-direction; and concepts of number, money, and time.

Social skills: interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté (i.e., wariness), social problem solving, following rules, obeying laws, and avoiding being victimized.

Practical skills: activities of daily living (personal care), occupational skills, use of money, safety, health care, travel, transportation, schedules, routines, and use of the telephone.

Criteria - Educational Performance

8. How do you define a “body of evidence”?

Teams should attempt to administer a formal achievement assessment on students who are able to respond to the items. The body of evidence should be utilized only for students who, because of their functioning level, cannot access the assessment. Examples of items for the body of evidence may include but are not limited to: criterion-referenced assessments, student work that compares them to their peers, developmental skills checklists, anecdotal records, and observations focused on academic achievement, as well as any medical or clinical records that are provided to the IEP team.

Ages 3 through 5

9. Does the child have to have 2 or more standard deviations in four of the following distinct areas: language development, communication, cognition, and general knowledge?

No, the child must have a standard score of 2 or more standard deviations below the mean on assessment in two areas of functioning: 1) language development and communication, and 2) cognition and general knowledge. Language development and communication are grouped together, and cognition and general knowledge are grouped together.

10. Does a Speech-Language Pathologist need to do formal assessments for ages 3-5 to determine delays in language development and communication?

No. A Speech-Language Pathologist is not required to perform a speech and language assessment under the educational performance criteria unless the area of speech and language is also a concern and being assessed.

Ages 6 through 21

11. Does the child have to have 2 or more standard deviations in each of the following areas? It states written language, reading, and mathematics. Previously it was only two out of three.

Yes, a student must have a score of two or more standard deviations below the mean on assessments of written language, reading and mathematics.

Reevaluation

12. What assessments and criteria are required for reevaluation to determine continued special education eligibility?

Upon reevaluation, a student who met initial identification criteria and continues to demonstrate a need for specially designed instruction, is a student with an intellectual disability. It is important for IEP teams to recognize that intellectual abilities and adaptive skills develop and change over time. Although initial criteria documentation is not required, a thorough review of existing data and information is required. In addition, to ensure an appropriately developed IEP, a reevaluation should consider including any assessments or collection of additional information, to identify a student's new or different disability-related needs as students academic and functional expectations change over time.



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