Identifying and Supporting English Learners with Disabilities

Virginia Department of Education
Office of Program Administration and Accountability
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Research and Policy Literature states...

No single method to differentiate

English learner having difficulty acquiring language skills

English learner who has a disability
Results of No Single Method

- Misidentified students placed in classrooms or programs mismatched to their needs
- Educational achievement is hindered
Key Elements to Inform Policymakers

Assessing

More effective procedures ...

Identifying

Supporting
Questions to consider when determining whether academic difficulties are caused by:

- Disability

- Struggles with second language acquisition or other factor
Special Education Services

- Provided only to students who are eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Provide programs for students ages 2 through 21 in Virginia

- There are 14 disability categories with specific criteria and definitions
Supports with Unique Regulations

Special Education

Title I

English Learners
IDEA and State Regulations

• Focus on data-based decision making

• Require specific documentation for all steps

• Provide specific requirements for:
  ▪ Evaluation of students suspected of having a disability;
  ▪ Process to determine if students are eligible for identification; and
  ▪ Process to determine needed services.
Suspicion of a Disability

- When a disability is suspected, a review of existing data and efforts is undertaken by a team, including the parents.

- Educators should provide data for any interventions and strategies attempted and outcomes.

- Cultural and language information are vital to prevent over-identification.
Evaluation of Students

“Provided and administered in the child’s native language and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.”

8 VAC 20-81-70 C 1b.
Evaluation of Students

“Materials and procedures used to assess a child with limited English proficiency are selected and administered to ensure that they measure the extent to which the child has a disability and needs special education rather than measuring the child’s English language skills.”

8 VAC 20-81-70 C 2.
Determining a Disability

“A child shall **not** be determined to be eligible under this chapter if the child does **not** otherwise meet the eligibility criteria or if the determinant factor is ... c) Limited English Proficiency.”

8 VAC 20-81-80
Federal Monitoring of IDEA

• Compliance with regulations
• Results for students with disabilities
• Over-identification
  ▪ Risk ratio calculations
  ▪ Coordinated early intervening services
Ask yourself:

Is the EL receiving instruction of sufficient quality to enable him or her to make the accepted levels of academic progress?
Ask yourself:

How does the EL’s progress in listening, speaking, reading, and writing English as a second language compare with the expected rate of progress for his or her age and initial level of English proficiency?
Ask yourself:

To what extent are behaviors that might otherwise indicate a disability considered to be normal for the child’s cultural background or to be part of the process of United States acculturation?
Ask yourself:

How might additional factors impact academic success?

- socioeconomic status
- previous education experience
- fluency in first language
- attitude toward school
- attitude toward learning English
- personality attributes
Most Effective Approach?

Structured process designed to answer questions using multiple key data
Several Types of Multiple Key Data

- Standardized test scores
- Classroom observations
- Other non-test data
- Parental input
Two Factors that Lead to Inconsistent Identification of Students Who May Have Disabilities

- A lack of understanding among teachers about why ELs are not making adequate progress

- Poorly designed and implemented referral processes
Effective Actions to Address Two Factors

- Providing professional development for educators
- Using pre-referral strategies, such as the Response to Intervention Approach
- Involving parents
- Considering multiple key forms of data
- Developing clear policy guidelines and data-tracking systems
Suggested Guiding Principles

• Having a **clear policy statement** on Considerations for Placing ELs in Special Education Programs

• Providing test accommodations for ELs

• Having exit criteria for English language support programs for ELs in special education
  ▫ **Note:** Arizona and Texas are the only two states with state approved exit criteria for removal of ESL support from the EL’s IEP
Suggested Guiding Principles

- Assessing EL’s language and disability needs (i.e. Response to Intervention Approach)

- Publishing extensive, publicly available manuals to aid educators in identifying and supporting ELs who have disabilities
Identifying and Supporting English Learners with Disabilities

Key issues in the literature and state practice

  - Enter Search: English-learners and students with disabilities
2015 Examination of 20 State Guidelines and Protocols

Illinois

Virginia

Minnesota

States with Support Manuals
Supporting the Process

• Understand federal state and local requirements for referral

• Provide specific data to inform the team
  ▫ Review of existing data: supports and strategies
  ▫ Techniques for use during assessments
  ▫ Cultural and linguistic considerations

• Educate others and broker information on ELs
Additional Considerations

• Determining if EL is the “determinant factor” is more difficult for some disability categories

• Consider the unique interplay of language and culture when a child is suspected of:
  ▪ Learning Disability
  ▪ Emotional Disability
  ▪ Intellectual Disability
  ▪ Autism
Stay Involved

• After eligibility, the team must draft an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

• IEP must address student needs and include:
  ▪ Services (must include ESL services)
  ▪ Accommodations
  ▪ Modifications
  ▪ Supports for school personnel
Your expertise is **vital**!

- Research
- Language learning expectations
- Social and cultural differences
- Acculturation processes
- Parental views of disabilities
A Resource for Educators

• Author: Celeste Roseberry-McKibbin
• Publisher: Academic Communication Associates
Additional Resources

*Handbook for Educators of Students Who are English Language Learners with Suspected Disabilities*

*Response to Instruction & Intervention (RtI²) for English Language Learners; RtI² Planning Form; and RtI² for ELLs Webinar:* located on WIDA Web site under Resources/Bulletins
https://www.wida.us/downloadLibrary.aspx

*Identifying ELLs with Specific Learning Disabilities: Facts, Advice, and Resources for School Teams:* located on WIDA Web site under Resources/Bulletins/Focus Bulletins
https://www.wida.us/downloadLibrary.aspx
Additional Resources

English Learner Toolkit: Chapter 6: Tools and Resources for Addressing English Learners with Disabilities
http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap6.pdf

English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities
http://www.colorincolorado.org/webcast/english-language-learners-learning-disabilities
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