



Speech or Language Impairments

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May is Better Hearing and Speech Month!

Speech or Language Impairments

- Definitions and eligibility criteria found in [Minnesota Rule 3525.1343](#).
- Includes four sub-categories:
 - Fluency Disorders
 - Voice Disorders
 - Language Disorders
 - Articulation Disorders
- Each of the above disorders has its own eligibility criteria, and represents a different facet of communication.
- These disorders may occur individually or comorbidly.

Not “Just Speech” or “Speech Only”

- Like other disability categories, Speech/Language Impairments may present along a spectrum of severity, and children may demonstrate a wide variety of needs resulting from their disability. Some examples include:
 - Functional: following basic directions, effectively communicating needs and wants.
 - Academic: developing phonological awareness (pre-literacy) skills, understanding and using the curriculum vocabulary across learning domains, asking and responding to questions about curriculum topics.
 - Social/Emotional/Behavioral: engaging in conversation with peers and adults, engaging in dramatic play schemes that require comprehension and use of intelligible language to organize or negotiate, challenging behaviors resulting from communication barriers, teasing from peers due to noticeable speech patterns.

Common Question #1

Q: Are children who are found eligible under any of the sub-categories of Speech or Language Impairments protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

A: Yes. A child identified with a fluency, voice, articulation, or language disorder (or any combination thereof) is a child with a disability under IDEA. As such, that child is entitled to free appropriate public education (FAPE).

[34 CFR §300.8\(a\)\(1\)](#) and [34 CFR §300.8\(c\)\(11\)](#)

Least Restrictive Environment

34 CFR §300.115(a):

“Each public agency must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.”

34 CFR §300.114(a)(2)(i):

“Each public agency must ensure that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled.”

- Like other disability categories, the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for a child eligible under Speech or Language Impairments is an individualized determination made by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. LRE determinations cannot be based on a disability category alone.
- While district resources (e.g. staffing, space) may be considered, they cannot drive the determination.

Common Question #2

Q: If the IEP team determines that an inclusive preschool setting is the LRE for a child eligible under Speech or Language Impairment, must the district pay for that placement?

A: Yes. If the IEP team determines that an inclusive preschool setting is necessary to ensure FAPE, that placement must be provided as outlined in the IEP at no cost to the child's family.

Instructional Setting Reminder

You may take into consideration other early childhood programs in which a child with a disability is already participating when coding the Instructional Setting.

See: [Decision Tree for Coding Instructional Settings](#)

Common Question #3

Q: Can Speech or Language Impairment be either the primary or secondary disability category?

A: Yes. When a child is eligible under more than one disability category (which could include Speech or Language Impairment) it is up to the IEP team to determine which category most impacts the child's functional or academic skills and abilities, and should be reported as the primary disability.

[MARSS Data Elements](#) – p. 75

Common Question #4

Q: Can a standard score that falls 1.5 standard deviations or more below the mean on a test of articulation be used toward eligibility for Developmental Delay?

A: Yes. Articulation is an important facet of communication, so it would be accurate to say that the child is demonstrating a delay in that area of development.

- All children with identified disabilities are equally protected under IDEA, regardless of the category under which they are eligible.
- All children, regardless of the category under which they are eligible, are entitled to *individualized* determinations about the services and Least Restrictive Environment that will best meet the needs resulting from their disability and ensure provision of FAPE.
 - These decisions cannot be based upon a disability category alone.
 - District policies must not be so rigid as to preclude individualized determinations.

Thank You!

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