



Department of Special Education & Health Services

Speech-Language Impairment (SLI) Eligibility Guidelines

Evaluations

- I. **Initial Evaluations** - A comprehensive evaluation should be performed by obtaining information from a variety of sources that are sensitive to cultural, linguistic, environmental factors and/or sensory impairments to include the following. Speech therapists who are evaluating English learners (EL) should consult with a colleague who has training and experience with evaluating ELs.
 1. **Language** Impairment- significant deficiency in the student's comprehension, form, content or use of language shall be determined by:
 - a. Vision & Hearing Screening
 - b. A minimum of one comprehensive standardized measure of receptive and expressive language (vocabulary, syntax, morphology, MLU, semantics, morphology) that falls at least **2.0 standard deviations below the mean**, with consideration to the assessment's standard error of measurement (SEM).¹ **Along with professional judgment.** This could be based on the test as a whole or the composite receptive/expressive language scores. Individual subtest scores shall not be used. – Non standardized tests will help support areas of weakness (e.g., narrative sample, oral/written, and language sample).
 - c. An additional standardized measure to support identified areas of delay that fall at least 2.0 standard deviations below the mean with consideration to the assessment's standard error of measure (SEM).² 2.0 will depend if the student qualifies as SLI and NOT as SLD.
 - d. When considering language (oral expression and/or listening comprehension) as a related service under SLD or any other eligibility category, standard scores of 1.5 SD below the mean must be utilized for a dual-discrepancy model and at least 1 SD below the mean for use with severe discrepancy (consult diagnostician for the appropriate model)

¹ According to [NM TEAM](#) (2017), eligibility determination whether SLI is a primary eligibility or as a related service should be made using professional judgment (see example using developmental delay on page 109). Eligibility to receive special education and/or related services should also be considered by the EDT if there is documentation *"if the child does not achieve adequately for the child's age or meet State-approved grade-level standards directly related to one or more of the specified SLD areas..."* (p. 247-248). such as in listening comprehension and oral expression.

² See Sec. 3 of [NM TEAM](#) (2017) prompting evaluators to *"rely more heavily on their professional judgment [at times] because of the individual child's characteristics and circumstances"* (p. 3).

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- e. Pragmatics (if identified as an area of concern)
- f. Auditory perception: selective attention, discrimination, memory, sequencing, association, and integration.
- g. Teacher Rating Scales
- h. Parent Input
- i. Documentation including observations and/or assessment of the language impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance in his/her learning environment and the need for specially designed instruction and related services (i.e., to include academic and/or nonacademic areas.)

2. **Articulation** (Speech Sound Production) – a significant deficiency in articulation shall be determined by all of the following:

- a. Use of test author's recommendations based on cutoff scores.
- b. Evidence that the child's score is at the moderate, severe, or profound level.
- c. Vision & Hearing Screening
- d. Teacher Rating Scale to show educational impact.
- e. Parent Input
- f. Students input if old enough
- g. Stimulability probes (make statement in report)
- h. Oral peripheral examination
- i. Analysis of phoneme production in conversational speech (intelligibility)
- j. Documentation including observation and/or assessment of how articulation impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance in his/her learning environment and the need for specialized instruction and related services to include academic and/or nonacademic areas.

3. **Phonological Processes:**

- a. Use standardized and nonstandardized measures to document speech rule based errors (fronting, cluster reduction, etc) that affects more than one sound.
- b. Document error patterns (i.e., phonological patterns)—systematic sound changes or simplifications that affect a class of sounds (e.g., fricatives), sound combinations (e.g., consonant clusters), or syllable structures (e.g., complex syllables or multisyllabic words) (ASHA, 2021).

4. **Voice –Evaluation** of vocal characteristics shall include the following:



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- a. Vision & Hearing Screening
- b. Examination by a otolaryngologist
- c. Oral Peripheral examination
- d. Complete measures of and/or qualitative descriptions of quality, resonance, pitch & volume.
- e. Documentation including observation and/or assessment of how voice impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance in his/her learning environment and the need for specialized instruction and related services to include academic and/or nonacademic areas.

5. **Fluency:**

- a. Vision & Hearing Screening
- b. Information obtained from parents, student, and teachers regarding non-fluent behaviors/attitudes across communication situations.
- c. Complete observations of oral, laryngeal, and respiratory behaviors.
- d. Complete a qualitative description of non-measurable aspects of fluency (i.e., coping behaviors, such as circumlocution, starter devices, postponement tactics, or attempts to disguise stutter and emotional reactions).
- e. Documentation, including observations across multiple settings and/or assessment, of how Fluency Impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance in his/her learning environment and the need for specialized instruction and related services (i.e, to include academic and/or non-academic areas.)

II. **Revaluations: REED**

1. **Articulation** (Speech Sound Production):

- a. During the meeting, provide the student's present levels of performance in the general and special education settings as well as in therapy. Use professional judgment to determine if formal testing is needed or not needed. This must be done one year prior to the student's reevaluation due date. If the IEP team, with guidance from the SLP, concludes that formal testing is warranted, then follow the initial eligibility criteria for evaluating the student.
- b. On the other side of the spectrum, if the student no longer exhibits a communication disorder, no longer demonstrates educational impact, or requires specially designed instruction to access and make progress in the curriculum, then dismissal considerations should be considered.



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2. Language Impairment:

- a. Formal comprehensive language reevaluation should be considered when reviewing existing data is deemed insufficient to determine if the student continues to exhibit a language impairment or if the parent requests updated testing.
- b. Based on [NM TEAM](#) (2017), "*There are **no specific reevaluation eligibility criteria**, therefore, it is up to the EDT to determine whether or not the child continues to have a disability based on the Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) process*" (p. 65).

3. Speech Impairment – Re-evaluation Considerations through the REED process.

1. A formal comprehensive speech reevaluation should be considered when reviewing existing data is deemed insufficient to determine if the student continues to exhibit a speech impairment, or if the parent requests updated testing.

2. Articulation/Phonology

- a. If further testing is not needed, provide the following information in your present levels in the REED and present levels of academic/functional performance within the IEP:
 - i. Intelligibility rating in conversational speech.
 - ii. Individual phoneme errors.
 - iii. Statement of educational impact resulting from the speech sound errors.
 - iv. If the student does not correct all sounds, but no longer demonstrates any educational impact related to the residual errors then dismissal should be considered.
 - v. Imperfections do not equate to educational disability.
- b. If further testing is warranted, the criteria for continued eligibility is the same as initial eligibility criteria.

3. Fluency REED Considerations

- a. A student may be considered not eligible under the category of "speech impaired" in the area of fluency when one of the following are documented.
 - i. Disfluencies are determined to be developmental in nature.



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- ii. Disfluencies do not interfere with the student's access to education and classroom participation.
 - iii. Rate is the only affected area.
 - iv. Speech disfluency is measured <5% in a variety of speaking samples (reading, narrative, answering questions).
 - v. A student can readily identify disfluencies and has demonstrated efficient use of fluency-induced strategies as well as coping mechanisms.
 - vi. No negative feelings/attitudes with the stuttering behavior are documented.
- b. If further testing is warranted:
- i. Follow initial eligibility criteria.

4. Voice REED Considerations

- a. No further testing is warranted
- i. Document the student's atypical voice characteristics of loudness, pitch, quality, or resonance for his/her age and gender.
 - ii. The student's voice impairment significantly affects his/her educational performance or social, emotional, or vocational development.
- b. If further testing is warranted.
- i. The criteria for eligibility is the same as the criteria for initial eligibility.

III. **Dismissal Considerations:**

- A. The criteria for exit from services for speech-language impairments is not specified in statute, regulation, or policy. *"Test-in test-out"* is **not** required in order to exit a student from service. Justification for proposed exit must be documented in the Prior Written Notice (PWN) such as *"student met all speech goals and has been observed producing correct sounds..."*
- B. A brief exit report may be written providing the following information.
- a. Student name, DOB, most recent IEP date, and most recent reevaluation date.
 - b. History of therapy progress.
 - c. Current levels of performance in therapy.
 - d. Teacher rating scales to demonstrate educational impact or not.



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- e. Parent Input
- f. Student does not require specialized instruction in order to participate in and make progress in the general education setting.
- c. The decision to dismiss is based upon IEP team input, initiated by the SLP.
- d. If progress is not observed over time, changes must be made in the interventions/accommodations. If continued lack of progress is shown, specific goals and interventions must be re-examined.
- e. The student no longer exhibits a speech or language impairment.
- f. The student's current academic level, behavioral characteristics, and impact on educational performance should be considered when determining dismissal.
- g. Dual support is being provided within other services of special education.
- h. It is important to note that when a student is receiving speech-language therapy as a related service under the umbrella of the primary disability and Speech language impairment (SLI) is not listed as a secondary disability on the IEP, it is not necessary to hold a reevaluation meeting to remove the related services from the IEP. The SLP should bring documentation and data to the IEP meeting and present it to the team regarding the student's progress and present levels of educational performance. If all team members agree that SLP services are no longer warranted, the goals and service time should be removed from the IEP, and documented on the PWN.

IV. Bilingual Initial Evaluation

- a. Students who have more than one language (bilingualism) should be evaluated in the students "*home*" language, when possible, in addition to English language.
- b. Diagnosis of SLI should show native language to have 2.0 standard deviations from the mean to be considered for services.
- c. Cultural and linguistic differences must be considered and noted within the report.
- d. Vision & Hearing Screening
- e. A minimum of one comprehensive standardized measure of receptive and expressive language (vocabulary, syntax, morphology, MLU, semantics, morphology) that falls at least 2.0 standard deviations below the mean, with



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consideration to the assessment's standard error of measurement (SEM).³ This could be based on the test as a whole or the composite receptive/expressive language scores. Individual subtest scores shall not be used.— Non standardized tests will help support areas of weakness (e.g., narrative sample, oral/written, and language sample).

- f. An additional standardized measure to support identified areas of delay that fall at least **2.0 standard deviations below the mean** with consideration to the assessment's standard error of measure.
 - g. Pragmatics (if identified as an area of concern)
 - h. Auditory perception: selective attention, discrimination, memory, sequencing, association, and integration.
 - i. Teacher Rating Scales
 - j. Parent Input
 - k. Documentation including observations and/or assessment of the language impairment adversely affects the child's educational performance in his/her learning environment and the need for specially designed instruction and related services (i.e., to include academic and/or nonacademic areas.)
- If a student has an existing IEP and is being referred for the first time for either a speech or language evaluation, it must be treated as an Initial evaluation. State guidelines must be used.

V. Related Service

- Use 1.5 SD below the mean plus professional judgment when needed.

VI. Role of the Speech Therapist in the Multi-Layered System of Supports (MLSS) Framework

"Multi-Layered System of Supports (MLSS)" means a coordinated and comprehensive framework that uses increasingly intensive evidence-based academic and behavioral supports that address student needs as evidenced by student data. It is a model for holistic school improvement that provides progress measures for additional supports such as school-based team structures, professional development, health and wellness, and family and community engagement.

Characteristics of quality interventions at Layers 2 and 3 require⁴:

³ According to [NM TEAM](#) (2017), eligibility determination whether SLI is a primary eligibility or as a related service should be made using professional judgment (see example using developmental delay on page 109).

⁴ Adapted from the Wyoming MTSS Fidelity of Implementation Rubric found [here](#).

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- Interventions are standardized and research-based (Layer 2); Intensive interventions are individualized (Layer 3).
- Increased duration and/or frequency of intervention.
- Intervention provided in small groups at the very least.
- Intensive interventions carried-out by a staff member trained in the intervention being offered.
- Intensive interventions address the general education curriculum in an appropriate manner for students.

According to The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA), speech therapists may participate in MTSS (see [ASHA and MTSS](#)). Specifically, ASHA states,

“Depending on setting and caseload, SLPs may participate in MTSS in myriad ways, including speech-language screenings, articulation support and social-communication instruction. Of course, SLPs may also face obstacles to implementing MTSS. Some of these could include gaining administrative and parental support to use MTSS to address speech sound disorders and finding time to work at additional tiers while managing an already-full caseload. Arranging mutually convenient times for collaboration with other educators can also be difficult.”



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References:

New Mexico Technical Evaluation and Assessment Manual ([NM TEAM](#), 2017).

American Speech-Language Hearing Association, Practice Portal, (December 2021).

Multi-Layered System of Support ([MLSS](#)) Student Assistance Team (SAT) Supplemental Manual, 2021.

Additional source - Tennessee Department of Education: Speech or Language Impairment Evaluation Guidance (December 2021)

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/special-education/eligibility/se_speech_or_language_impairment_evaluation.pdf