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June 2015

SPECIAL EDUCATION FIELD ADVISORY

FROM: James P. DeLorenzo

SUBJECT: Federal Guidance on Students with Disabilities with High Cognition

The purpose of this memorandum is to remind school districts of their obligation to evaluate all students suspected of having a disability regardless of their cognitive skills. In a December 20, 2013 letter to Dr. Jim Delisle (*Letter to Delisle*), the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs provided guidance and clarification regarding determining eligibility for special education programs and services for students with disabilities with high cognition. The *Letter to Delisle* specifically addresses students with high cognition who may be eligible for special education programs and services as a student with a learning disability but also cites the broader requirements that:

- an individual evaluation must include a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the student that may assist in determining whether the student is a student with a disability [See 8 NYCRR section 200.4(b)]; and
- no single measure or assessment is used as the sole criterion for determining whether a student is a student with a disability or for determining an appropriate educational program for a student [See 8 NYCRR section 200.4(b)(6)(v)].

School districts should review the attached federal guidance to ensure their district's procedures relating to individual evaluations are consistent with federal and State standards.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please share this memorandum and the *Letter to Delisle* with appropriate staff, including Directors of Special Education, Committee on Special Education Chairpersons, Directors of Pupil Personnel Service, as well as Parent Teacher Associations. Questions on this memorandum should be directed to the Special Education Policy Unit at (518) 473-2878 or to the Special Education Quality Assurance Office in your region:

Central Regional Office	(315) 428-4556
Eastern Regional Office	(518) 486-6366
Hudson Valley Regional Office	(518) 473-1185
Long Island Regional Office	(631) 952-3352
New York City Regional Office	(718) 722-4544
Western Regional Office	(585) 344-2002
Nondistrict Unit	(518) 473-1185

Attachment



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE
SERVICES

December 20, 2013

Dr. Jim Delisle
Distinguished Professor of Education (Retired)
P.O. Box 3550
North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582

Dear Dr. Delisle:

This letter is in response to your emails to me dated March 8, 2013 and April 4, 2013 asking for clarification of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its implementing regulations as they apply to children who have high cognition and who may have specific learning disabilities (SLD). In your communications, you refer to these children as "twice exceptional students" or "2E students."

The IDEA does not specifically address "twice exceptional" or "2E" students. It remains the Department's position that students who have high cognition, have disabilities and require special education and related services are protected under the IDEA and its implementing regulations. See *Letter to Anonymous*, dated January 13, 2010 (55 IDELR 172). That is, under 34 CFR §300.8, a child must meet a two-prong test to be considered an eligible child with a disability: (1) have one of the specified impairments (disabilities); and (2) because of the impairment, need special education and related services.

With regard to your first question, under 34 CFR §300.307, a State must adopt, consistent with 34 CFR §300.309, criteria for determining whether a child has an SLD as defined in 34 CFR §300.8(c)(10). In addition, the criteria adopted by the State: (1) must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has an SLD; (2) must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and (3) may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has an SLD. Therefore, a State's criteria under 34 CFR §300.307 may permit, but must not require, the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has an SLD.

Regarding your second question, the regulations do not require or prohibit a State's use of "cut scores" when determining if there is a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has an SLD; rather, the regulations allow a State flexibility in establishing its criteria for determining whether a child has an SLD, as long as those criteria meet the requirements in 34 CFR §300.307(a). It is important to note that in determining whether a child has a disability -- whether an SLD or any of the other disability categories identified in 34 CFR §300.8 -- the IDEA requires the use of a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child, and prohibits the use of any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability and for determining an appropriate educational program for the child. 34 CFR §300.304(b)(1) and (2). Therefore, it would be

inconsistent with the IDEA for a child, regardless of whether the child is gifted, to be found ineligible for special education and related services under the SLD category solely because the child scored above a particular cut score established by State policy. Further, under 34 CFR §300.309(a)(1), the group described in §300.306 may determine that a child has an SLD if the child "does not achieve adequately for the child's age or to meet State-approved grade level standards... when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child's age or State-approved grade level standards" in one or more of the following areas: oral expression; listening comprehension; written expression; basic reading skill; reading fluency skills; reading comprehension; mathematics calculation; or mathematics problem solving.

In the *Analysis of Comments and Changes* in the 2006 final regulations implementing Part B of the IDEA, the Department, in responding to public comments, recognized that there will be some students who are gifted but also need special education and related services. See 71 Fed. Reg. 46540, 46647 (Aug. 14, 2006) ("Discrepancy models are not essential for identifying children with SLD who are gifted. However, the regulations clearly allow discrepancies in achievement domains, typical of children with SLD who are gifted, to be used to identify children with SLD."). In responding to a public comment specifically addressing students who are gifted and who have difficulty with reading fluency, the Department stated as follows: "No assessment, in isolation, is sufficient to indicate that a child has an SLD. Including reading fluency in the list of areas to be considered when determining whether a child has an SLD makes it more likely that a child who is gifted and has an SLD would be identified." 71 Fed. Reg. at 46652.

Lastly, you suggest that OSEP adopt specific language to clarify the use of discrepancy models and response-to-intervention models when determining if a child is a child with an SLD. We believe that further clarification is unnecessary at this time.

Based on section 607(e) of the IDEA, we are informing you that our response is provided as informal guidance and is not legally binding, but represents an interpretation by the U.S. Department of Education of the IDEA in the context of the specific facts presented.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jennifer Wolfsheimer at 202-245-6090 or by email at Jennifer.Wolfsheimer@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melody Musgrove', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Melody Musgrove, Ed.D.
Director
Office of Special Education Programs