

Quick Guide: Intellectual Disability

What Is Intellectual Disability?

According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, “Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical skills, which are apparent prior to the age of 18.

The definition of intellectual disability above does not stand alone; the definition must be applied within a context based on five assumptions:

1. Limitations in present functioning must be considered within the context of community environments typical of the individual’s age peers and culture;
2. Valid assessment considers cultural and linguistic diversity as well as differences in communication, sensory, motor, and behavioral factors;
3. Within the individual, limitations often coexist with strengths;
4. An important purpose of describing limitations is to develop a profile of needed supports; and
5. With appropriate personalized supports over a sustained period, the life functioning of the person with intellectual disability generally will improve.” (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2011)

Intellectual Disability is a disability that is characterized by a significantly sub-average intellectual functioning as measured by an individually administered standardized test of cognitive abilities.

The overall test score must be two or more standard deviations below the mean, when taking into consideration the standard error of measure.

In addition, the student must exhibit deficits in at least two areas of adaptive behavior. Adaptive behaviors include everyday coping skills such as:

- Grooming
- Dressing
- Safety
- Safe food handling
- School rules
- Ability to work
- Money management
- Cleaning
- Making friends
- Social skills, and
- Personal responsibility

The assessment of adaptive behaviors determines strengths and weaknesses that a student may have in regards to their ability to meet age-level expectations and/or demands. It identifies the strengths a student has as well as the need for new and expanded adaptive skills.

What Is the Prevalence of Intellectual Disability?

As many as 3 out of every 100 people in the country have an intellectual disability (The Arc, 2001). Nearly 613,000 children ages 6 to 21 have some level of intellectual disability and need special education in school (Twenty-fourth Annual Report to Congress, U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In fact, 1 out of every 10 children who need special education has some form of intellectual disability.

What Are Adaptive Behaviors?

Students who have major deficits in adaptive skills may have difficulties with important life activities, including interacting with peers, taking care of personal needs, learning new skills, and general functioning in the home, school and community. (Best Practice in School Psychology V, pg. 605)

Adaptive behaviors are the conceptual, social and practical skills that have been learned and are performed by people in their everyday life.

Examples of Adaptive Behavior Skills:

- Conceptual components of adaptive behavior include communication, functional academics such as reading and writing, money, time and number concepts, self-direction and health and safety skills.
- The Social Domain includes interpersonal and leisure skills. This includes social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, the ability to follow rules/obey laws, and to avoid being victimized and social problem solving.
- Practical skills include activities of daily living (personal care), occupational skills, use of money, safety, healthcare, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, and use of the telephone.
- Supports are resources and strategies that promote the development, education, interests, and personal well-being of a person and enhance individual functioning.

What Does the Legal Framework for the Child-Centered Process Say?

Legal Framework:

<http://fw.esc18.net/frameworkdisplayportlet/ESC18-FW-Summary.aspx?FID=137>

Intellectual Disability:

Authorities: 20 U.S.C. §§ 1401, 1414; 34 C.F.R. Part 300; Texas Education Code; 19 T.A.C. Chapter 89

The child must be assessed in all areas of suspected disability.

Group of Qualified Professionals:

The group must comply with the EVALUATION PROCEDURES framework.

Criteria:

The child may be considered to be a child with intellectual disabilities if:

- When given a standardized, individually administered test of cognitive ability, the child demonstrates significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning in which the overall test score is at least two standard deviations below the mean, when taking into consideration the standard error of measurement of the test;
- The child demonstrates concurrent deficits in at least two of the following areas of adaptive behavior:
 - Communication;
 - Self-care;
 - Home living;
 - Social and interpersonal skills;
 - Use of community resources;
 - Self-direction;
 - Functional academic skills;
 - Work;
 - Leisure;
 - Health; and
 - Safety;
- The child's deficits are manifested during the developmental period; and
- By reason of the intellectual disabilities, the child needs special education and related services.

Eligibility Determination:

The DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY must be made by the admission, review, and dismissal ARD COMMITTEE.

What Is Subaverage General Intellectual Functioning?

Subaverage general intellectual functioning is described as the overall test score that is at least two standard deviations below the mean, when taking into consideration the standard error of measurement of the test.

- In the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV (WISC-IV), the Standard Error of Measurement (SEM) for the Full Scale Intelligence Quotient (FSIQ) for an 11-year-old child is 2.60.
- For the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-IV (WAIS-IV), the SEM for the FSIQ for a 16-17 year-old is 2.60.
- For the Woodcock Johnson-III Cognitive Battery (WJ-III), the SEM for a 5-year-old is 2.60.

The standard error of measurement is an estimate of the amount of error in a test score. The formula to calculate it is: $SEM = SD \sqrt{1 - r_{xx}}$

Where SEM represents the Standard Error of Measurement, SD is the standard deviation, and r_{xx} is the reliability coefficient.

What Does the Commissioner's Rules Guidance Say About Intellectual Disability?

What are important considerations regarding intellectual disability eligibility? (§89.1040 Eligibility Criteria Frequently Asked Questions)

While additional flexibility has been added to the rule in order to reflect current thinking regarding the determination of intellectual disability (ID), schools are encouraged to exercise caution in making such determinations in order to avoid over-identifying students. The determination of ID must be made through the use of professional judgment, including consideration of multiple information/data sources to support the eligibility determination. Information/data sources may include statewide assessment results, RtI progress monitoring data and anecdotal reports, in addition to formal evaluation test scores (e.g. intellectual quotient or IQ; adaptive behavior, achievement; cognitive function/processing, etc).

A deficit (limitation in function) refers to the effectiveness of the individual in meeting adaptive standards typical to age peers, environment, and cultural expectation.

How should standard error of measurement (SEM) be used in the determination of intellectual disability eligibility? (§89.1040 Eligibility Criteria Frequently Asked Questions)

Evaluation instruments provide information on the standard error of measurement (SEM) for its global score. A SEM is typically 3-4 points but varies depending on test instrument and age of student. The evaluation professional must consult the appropriate test manual to determine the SEM for that particular student. The SEM should not be confused with the confidence interval.

References

19 T.A.C. Chapter 89

34 C.F.R. Part 300

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2011). <http://www.aamr.org/>

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2011). *What is the AAIDD definition of intellectual disability?* Retrieved from http://www.aaidd.org/IntellectualDisabilityBook/content_7473.cfm?navID=366

A. Thomas and J. Grimes (eds.) (2008) Best practices in school psychology V. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists. (p.605)

Texas Education Agency. (2010). §89.1040 Eligibility Criteria Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/guidance/eligibilityfaq.pdf>

Region 18, Education Service Center and Texas Education Agency. (2010). The Legal Framework for the Child-Centered Special Education Process- Intellectual Disability. Retrieved from <http://fw.esc18.net/frameworkdisplayportlet/ESC18-FW-Summary.aspx?FID=137>

Resources

http://www.aaid.org/intellectualdisabilitybook/content_2348.cfm?navID=267

<http://nads.org/>

<http://www.thearc.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=183>

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddmr.htm>

http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/birth_defect/mental_retardation.html#

<http://learningdisabilities.about.com/od/medicalinterventions/g/adptbehvrdefin.htm>

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/guidance/rules/89.1040.html>