

Preschool Children and Speech or Language Impairment

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to clarify information about how comprehensive evaluations are conducted and services provided for preschool children with speech-language concerns.

Conducting Comprehensive Evaluations Evaluation procedure requirements apply to determine all disability categories. The category of Speech or Language Impairment (SLI) is no exception. These procedures must ensure an evaluation that is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all the preschool child's special education and related service needs, whether or not commonly linked to the suspected disability category.

When an evaluation is conducted, a child is evaluated for the purpose of determining eligibility as a "child with a disability". This means a child has been evaluated in accordance with rule [OAC 3301-51-06](#) of the Administrative Code to determine if the child meets the criteria for a disability category and to determine how the disability affects the child's progress in the general education curriculum. For preschool it is a requirement that each developmental area must be assessed using at least one of the 5 assessment methods/data sources. Each assessment method/data source must be used at least once. Structured observations are required in more than one setting and during multiple activities.

The criteria for the disability category of speech or language impairment are included within the definition.

Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment or a voice impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance (3301-51-01(B)(10)(d)(xi))

The evaluation team must provide evidence that the speech or language disorder has an adverse effect on educational performance. It is possible for a student to have a clinical or medical diagnosis but not meet the federal and state criteria for an educational identification as a child with a speech or language impairment.

If the comprehensive assessment from a preschool special education evaluation shows that the child meets the criteria, then the child is entitled to special education and related services as well as access to the general education curriculum just like with any other disability category.

The term "speech only" is often used to refer to a child with a disability category of SLI. A more accurate term to use is "child with SLI" as this helps people to understand that this child is entitled to receive all the supports and services that any preschool child with a disability would receive. A district cannot only provide speech therapy services; the district must provide a child with SLI access to the general education curriculum in addition to any necessary special education and/or related services.

IEP Services The IEP team makes the decisions about what services will be provided to address goals, who will provide services and where for a child with SLI (just like for any child with a disability). The IEP team must consider how the child will be provided access to the general education curriculum in addition to the special education/related services.

When determining services, the school district shall consider the requirements in rule [OAC 3301-51-09](#) and the following factors:

- The child’s ability to participate and progress in the general early childhood curriculum;
- The child’s socialization needs; and
- The child’s educational and developmental progress.

The special education services should support the child in those areas that made the child eligible as a child with a disability. What was the educational impact of the disability? If the child has speech/language needs, how will adults support those needs so that the child can access, participate and make progress in the general education curriculum? Which parts of the preschool curriculum and Early Learning and Development Standards are affected by the disability? It’s important that services be provided in a way that connect to the preschool curriculum and standards and that services are not solely medical or therapeutic.

It is also an IEP team decision as to who and how many staff will provide services to meet the child’s needs. It would be acceptable if an IEP team decided that an SLP would be the only provider. In that case, the SLP should be knowledgeable about working in preschool environments, able to embed IEP services within the natural routines and activities of a classroom, and able to collaborate with the classroom teacher. It would also be acceptable if the team decided that an Intervention Specialist (IS) and a Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) would provide services to support the same speech/language goal. Or to have the IS be the sole provider to the child but be in consultation with the SLP. Again, the IEP team determines who will provide services based on the child’s needs and not based on organizational needs. For example, a district cannot decide to have an IS provide communication services only because no SLP is available.

And finally, the IEP team decides where services will be provided. The IEP team will determine a placement for the child in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and the team will determine where services will be provided within that placement. For example, if an IEP team determines that a general education classroom is the child’s LRE, then the team will also need to decide if all IEP services will be provided in the classroom or if some of the services need to be provided in a different setting, such as a therapy room. Anytime a child is removed from typical peers, though, a rationale for that removal needs to be included in the IEP.

If an IEP team determines that a child with SLI will not attend a classroom setting and will receive IEP services in a service provider location, then the district must still provide the child access to the general education curriculum. According to rule, “a child served in the home or service provider location must be provided a minimum of one hour of instruction per week in the general education curriculum that includes specially designed instruction”. The IEP team would need to document within the IEP Section 11 who is providing instruction in the general education curriculum and how that person is providing access to the general education curriculum *in the child’s area of need* as identified in the IEP. (See Preschool Universal Supports IEP Part 3 for more information about completing section 11.)

At any time during the evaluation or IEP process, if there is a disagreement between a parent and the school district, then the [Dispute Resolution Process](#) outlined in the [Procedural Safeguards](#) should be followed.

Resources:

- [Preschool Universal Supports](#): The Office of Early Learning & School Readiness Preschool Special Education staff have developed narrated presentations and scripts that provide guidance for completing the ETR and IEP forms for preschool children.
- [ECTA Center: Practice Guides for Practitioners](#): The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) has developed **Practice Guides for Practitioners** that are intended primarily for practitioners working in group settings and for sharing with other practitioners in community programs. Multiple Practice Guides are available on the following topics: assessment, environment, family, instruction, interaction, teaming and collaboration, transition.
- [Evaluation and Eligibility for Speech-Language Services in Schools \(asha.org\)](#)- Article from ASHA that also details evaluation and eligibility for SLI services. Highlights areas such as the difference between a medical diagnosis vs a special education educational diagnosis for speech and language impairment.