

Re: Guideline for eligibility criteria for ADD/ADHD diagnosed students to receive Special Education services under the category of Other Health Impaired (OHI)

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The reason ADD/ADHD creates challenges is because its impact is difficult to measure, which gathering information about the student and his/her performance even more vital to eligibility decisions. District staff sometime think an ADD/ADHD diagnosis by a physician means a student is automatically entitled to services. However, this is not the case if the condition isn't substantially impacting a student's learning. The key issue here is whether the student's medical diagnosis is supported by the evidence.

All too often, a parent will tell the doctor that their child is easily distracted and can't pay attention, which often times results in a physician's diagnosis of ADD/ADHD. However, a ADD/ADHD diagnosis should be based on a child's history.

A useful tool used by physicians and mental health providers alike is the DSM-IV. This handbook describes specific prerequisites that must be met before making an ADHD diagnosis, for example. The requirements include symptoms identified before age seven and evaluation of symptoms at home, work or school. However, more times than not, districts are not contacted by a physician to provide information about the student's behavior or to complete a behavior rating scale, which may present questions as to whether the diagnosis follows the DSM-IV criteria.

In order to determine special education eligibility a multi-disciplinary team needs to collect information through the SIT team process first to determine if testing is necessary or not. If the team feels testing is needed then the evaluation teams mission is to identify if the student's learning, attendance or performance is affected. The evaluation should be comprehensive in nature to include academic and cognitive functioning levels, other testing data available by building team members, day-to-day performance and general history of grades and whether or not the student has been recommended for after school services or summer school, frequency of behavioral issues and how the ADD/ADHD relates to the overall behavioral impact (i.e.: in-school suspensions and out of school suspensions, detentions and phone calls to parents) on learning and attendance.

Whether or not the student will become eligible for special education services or a 504 plan, the decisions for students diagnosed with ADD/ADHD need to focus on whether there is a direct impact on the student's ability to learn and be available for instruction.

In Marysville, WA. Sch. Dist. No.25, 25IDELR992 (1996), OCR stated reliance on a medical diagnosis alone is an insufficient evaluation for 504 eligibility.

Source used for this procedural guideline: 2006 LRP Publications, Section 504 Compliance Advisor, Vol. 10, Issue 3)