

Guidance for IEP Teams: Alternative Methodology for Meeting Gifted Screening Requirements



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Introduction

Districts are required to provide services for all gifted and talented students at the elementary and secondary levels. Students are identified for this program by demonstrating high performance ability or potential in academic and/or artistic areas. In accordance with State Board of Education (SBE) Regulation 43-220, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) provides an aptitude and an achievement assessment in second grade for this purpose.

The objective of the grade two testing program is to evaluate each student for placement into a district gifted and talented program. In accordance with SBE Regulation 43-220, students must meet the criteria for two out of the three dimensions outlined in this law. Dimension A, reasoning abilities, requires students to demonstrate high aptitude (93rd national age percentile) in one or more of these areas: verbal/linguistic, quantitative/mathematical, nonverbal, and/or a composite of the three. Scores on CogAT may be used for this purpose. Dimension B, high achievement in reading and/or mathematical areas of the regulation requires that students demonstrate high achievement in reading and/or mathematical areas (94th national percentile and above) as measured by a nationally normed or statewide assessment. Scores on the Iowa Assessments may be used for this purpose. Dimension C, intellectual/academic performance, requires students to demonstrate a high degree of interest in and commitment to academic and/or intellectual pursuits or demonstrate intellectual characteristics such as curiosity/inquiry, reflection, persistence/tenacity in the face of challenge, and creative productive thinking. These characteristics may be demonstrated with a score of sixteen on either the verbal or nonverbal component of the Performance Task Assessments for grade 3 placement.

Student Participation and Purpose of the Guidance

South Carolina law requires districts to screen all students for a district Gifted and Talented Program. This includes students with disabilities. Students who are repeating grade two must also be included in the test administration. There are two groups of students that are difficult to screen using the CogAT and Iowa Assessments. Their needs and next steps are defined below:

Group 1: Students who have sufficient evidence to be determined NOT eligible

There are instances when districts have sufficient test data on a student to be able to demonstrate they have met the screening requirements and that the student *does not meet* the eligibility criteria for gifted and talented services. In such cases the administration of the CogAT and Iowa Assessments is not necessary.

This alternative methodology is intended for students who during initial placement, evaluation, or reevaluation for special education have meet the necessary screening requirements for gifted and talented and have demonstrated categorically that they *do not meet* the eligibility requirements for gifted and talented services.

Students who may meet the criteria as already being screened could include students who:

- demonstrate a significant cognitive disability and adaptive skill deficits, which result in performance that is substantially below grade-level achievement expectations even with the use of accommodations and modifications;
- access the state approved curriculum standards at less complex levels and with modified instruction;
- demonstrate the inability to achieve the state grade-level achievement expectations is not the result of excessive or extended absences or social, cultural, or economic differences.

Group 2: Students who have sufficient evidence to demonstrate they may be eligible

This alternative methodology is intended for students who, during initial placement, evaluation, or reevaluation for special education, have met the necessary screening requirements for gifted and talented and have demonstrated that they *may* meet the eligibility requirements for gifted and talented services.

Through initial evaluation the student demonstrated reasoning abilities in the 93rd national age percentile in: verbal/linguistic, quantitative/mathematical, nonverbal, and/or a composite of the three. Or the student demonstrated high achievement in reading and/or mathematical in the 94th national percentile and above as measured by a nationally normed assessment. In this situation the student has met either Dimension A or B. If the student has met both dimensions A and B the student will need to move to the next steps defined by the district to determine eligibility for gifted and talented. If the student has met *either* A or B the student will need to be assessed in Dimension C. Dimension C, intellectual/academic performance, requires students to demonstrate a high degree of interest in and commitment to academic and/or intellectual pursuits or demonstrate intellectual characteristics such as curiosity/inquiry, reflection, persistence/tenacity in the face of challenge, and creative productive thinking. One of the methods by which these characteristics may be demonstrated is with a score of sixteen on either the verbal or nonverbal component of the Performance Task Assessments for grade 3 placement.

In this situation the requirements for screening for gifted and talented have been met. The screening using the CogAT and Iowa Tests is not necessary and the student should move to the next steps as defined by the district to determine eligibility for gifted and talented defined in State Board of Education Regulation 43-220.

Screening Criteria

A student with a documented disability is either a student who has been evaluated and found to meet the eligibility criteria for enrollment in special education as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and South Carolina State Board of Education Regulation 43-243.1 or a student who has a disability covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Students with a current Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Accommodations Plan *must* participate in *screening* for identification for the academic gifted and talented program. Students should participate in the CogAT and Iowa Assessments, as appropriate, or in an *alternative screening* process that includes a documented review of existing data from norm-referenced aptitude and norm-referenced mathematics and reading comprehension assessments.

The student's IEP team determines whether the student will participate in the CogAT and Iowa Assessments in the same manner as other students or with accommodations. Students cannot be excluded from screening because of a disability. Decisions are made on an individual student basis, not on the basis of the category of disability or instructional placement. The student's IEP team would determine if there is sufficient data to determine that the screening requirements for gifted and talented have been met and the student does not need the CogAT and Iowa Assessments administered.

Information/Data Considerations

Norm-referenced refers to standardized tests that are designed to compare and rank test takers in relation to one another. Norm-referenced tests report whether test takers performed better or worse than a hypothetical average student, which is determined by comparing scores against the performance results of a statistically selected group of test takers, typically of the same age or grade level, who have already taken the exam.

During an initial evaluation for special education, it is necessary to examine all areas of a child's functioning to establish baseline information on the child and to recognize areas of impairment. The team must examine information related to cognitive and behavioral factors; physical or developmental factors; all of the child's special education and related service needs, whether or not those needs are commonly linked to the disability category in which the child has been classified; information related to enabling the child to be involved in and progress in the general education curriculum; and relevant functional, developmental, and academic information.

During the process of an evaluation for special education, the team determines the means of evaluation for the student. Many times the evaluation includes norm-referenced aptitude and norm-referenced mathematics and reading comprehension assessment. If the student was

evaluated using these types of tests, these scores may be used as alternative methodology for meeting screening requirements for gifted eligibility.

A current, individually administered, norm-referenced full scale measure with appropriate reliability, validity, and standardization is often part of an initial evaluation. These types of measures meet the requirements for screening for gifted and talented services. This could include:

1. Norm-referenced measures showing significant delays in functioning in the core academic areas when compared to the child's same-aged peers.
2. Measures of achievement showing significantly lower performance than peers;
3. Standardized, individually administered measures of intellectual ability and academic achievement;
4. An outside evaluation from an appropriately credentialed professional. This evaluation is only allowed in situations where the school is determining the student is NOT gifted and talented.

If the team is considering making the student eligible for gifted and talented services, the school or district gifted and talented representative must be present.

Timeframes of evaluation measures

Sattler (2001) explains that the stability of aptitude through childhood and adolescence depends on measurement factors, genetic factors, and environmental factors. Intelligence test scores of school-aged children show more stable correlations with scores *obtained after 5 years* of age. Generally, aptitude scores obtained before 5 years of age have to be interpreted cautiously. When a child is 5 years old or older however, his or her aptitude tends to remain relatively stable. Children with high aptitudes tend to show more change than do children with low aptitudes. If the measure was considered to be a valid and reliable reflection of the student's skills (meaning there were no mitigating circumstances such as significant distractibility, poor effort, etc.), the measure can be used. For these reasons, if the measure has been administered after age five AND within the last two years AND is considered to be a valid and reliable measure of the student's ability AND is consistent with other measures (achievement, teacher report, other standardized assessment results), it may be used to determine that a student can be considered sufficiently screened for gifted and talented and the CogAT and Iowa Assessments do not need to be administered.

Academic measures must be done within the last year in order to determine if the student has been sufficiently screened for gifted and talented services. In the case of academics and determining a student is *not eligible* for gifted and talented services, a criterion-referenced test may be used. Criterion-referenced tests and assessments are designed to measure student performance against a fixed set of predetermined criteria or learning standards—i.e., concise,

written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education.

In order to use initial evaluation or reevaluation as an alternative method of screening for gifted eligibility the team must have included:

- At least one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment); if the child does not have a regular teacher, a regular classroom teacher qualified to teach a child of his or her age; or if the child is less than school age, an individual qualified to teach a child of his or her age;
- At least one special education teacher of the child, or where appropriate, not less than one special education service provider of the child;
- A representative of the local education agency who: Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disability, is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, and is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency;
- An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results;
- At the discretion of the parent or agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate. (34 CFR § 300.321; 34 CFR § 300.308)

If the IEP team determines that a student will be screened for gifted eligibility using an alternative methodology, this decision should be reflected in the prior written notice of the meeting, along with the measures used to make the decision. This is also documented in the state standardized assessment section of the IEP.

Sattler, Jerome (2001.) *Assessment of Children, Cognitive Applications* pages 168-171. San Diego, Jerome M. Sattler, Publisher, Inc.