

New Mexico TEAM Professional Development Module: Hearing Impairment, including Deafness

[Slide 1] Welcome

Welcome to the New Mexico TEAM technical assistance module on making eligibility determinations under the category of hearing impairment, including deafness. Throughout this module, we will refer to this eligibility category as “hearing impairment,” but teams should understand that this includes all degrees of hearing impairment, including deafness. This module will review the guidance of the NM TEAM section on hearing impairment. During this module, you will sometimes be referred back to a different module or other resources for additional information. We encourage you to have a copy of the NM TEAM available and open to the section on hearing impairment for reference during this module.

[Slide 2] Learner Objectives

After successfully completing this module, you will have the knowledge to use evaluation data effectively to make an eligibility determination under the category of hearing impairment. Specifically, you will be able to: understand the federal definition of hearing impairment, identify some common characteristics of hearing impairment and the associated educational impact, and recognize special considerations for assessment for children with known or suspected hearing impairment. Additionally, you will understand the highly recommended and potential components of an evaluation for hearing impairment, know the criteria required for eligibility under the category of hearing impairment, and understand how to document the team’s eligibility determination decisions.

[Slides 3-5] Definition

[Slide 3] When teams are making eligibility determination decisions, IDEA outlines a two-step approach. Each of these steps involves responding to a specific question—the first question is “Does the child have a disability as defined by IDEA?” and the second question is “Does the child require specially designed instruction as a result of this disability?”

This module will walk you through answering those two questions. First, we’ll talk about the definition of hearing impairment, as defined by IDEA, to help you begin to better understand the disability itself. Next, we’ll talk about the impact of the disability on educational performance to help you understand when a child might require specially designed instruction as a result of hearing impairment. Later, after establishing this basic framework, we’ll talk more specifically about the evaluation components and the eligibility determination decisions.

IDEA’s definitions of disability terms are the cornerstones of eligibility determination decisions. The definition, combined with comprehensive assessment data, including detailed information about the child’s background, educational strengths and needs, and other pertinent factors, helps schools, educators, and parents determine if the child is eligible for and in need of special education and related services. Please take a moment to read the IDEA definition of hearing impairment and then we’ll take a closer look at it.

[Slide 4] Now let’s take a closer look at the definition. This definition of the disability will help teams answer the question: “Does the child have a disability as defined by IDEA?”

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The definition of hearing impairment is fairly straightforward. To be identified as a child with a hearing impairment, the child must have a hearing impairment that is significant enough as to have a negative impact on the child's educational performance. This definition includes children with both permanent and fluctuating hearing impairments.

[Slide 5] In New Mexico, this eligibility category includes varying degrees of hearing impairment, including deafness.

It is important to remember that this disability must adversely affect the child's educational performance in order for him to be found eligible for special education and related services. We'll talk about this second step to eligibility determination decisions by first talking about educational performance in general and then looking specifically at issues related to hearing impairment.

[Slides 6-12] Educational Performance

[Slide 6] To determine the impact of a disability on a child's educational performance, the team needs to answer the question: "Does the child require specially designed instruction as a result of this disability?" If a child with a disability does not require specially designed instruction, then the child would not qualify under IDEA and teams should consider the implementation of a Section 504 plan or other classroom interventions to address the child's needs.

[Slide 7] According to IDEA, specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to meet the unique needs that result from a child's disability. This includes special education.

[Slide 8] In New Mexico, services provided by a speech-language pathologist may also be considered special education, not simply a related service, if the services meet the requirements outlined in the New Mexico Administrative Code, typically referred to as NMAC.

[Slide 9] When evaluating a child for potential eligibility for special education and related services under the eligibility category of hearing impairment, according to IDEA, it is important that teams remember to consider three aspects of the child's educational performance. This includes the child's ability to: be involved and make progress in the general education curriculum, participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities, and be educated and participate with other children with and without disabilities.

[Slide 10] Teams are probably most familiar and most comfortable with the first of these areas: determining if a child's disability results in a need for specially designed instruction in order to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum. While this includes academic progress, it may also include social skills, problem solving, communication, and other general curriculum areas.

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[Slide 11] Second, it is also important for teams to consider whether a child needs specially designed instruction in order to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities, such as recess, sports, choir, drama, and other clubs or school-related activities. For example, a child with hearing impairment may be performing satisfactorily in classroom activities because of the amount of supports inherent in the classroom environment. However, this child may have difficulty with participation in extracurricular activities, like soccer or choir, because of the interaction between his disability and the nature of the activities. According to IDEA, this child may be found eligible for special education and related services because of the impact of his disability on his ability to participate in these activities. An example of this might be a child with hearing impairment who requires supplementary aids and services to participate in after-school clubs. It is important to recognize that IDEA doesn't guarantee children access to competitive teams or groups **because** of their disability. However, they should be permitted the same opportunity as other children to try out for the activities and/or teams. The New Mexico Activities Association provides guidance regarding academic eligibility for participation for children enrolled in special education programs.

[Slide 12] The third and final area for teams to consider is the child's ability to be educated and participate with other children, including those with and without disabilities. This is essentially a question of educational environment. For example, a child with hearing impairment may be able to access the general **curriculum** and participate in extracurricular activities, but because of his disability, it may be especially difficult for him to be educated in the general education classroom. This is not a discussion about where services will be delivered, but what services are necessary. For example, an eligibility determination team, or EDT, may determine that a child with challenging behaviors needs specially designed instruction in order to develop and support appropriate classroom behaviors and interactions. Other examples include a child with attention difficulties who requires specially designed instruction to learn strategies to improve his attention and focus in the classroom, or a child who needs specially designed instruction in the form of social skills interventions in order to participate in activities with peers. Where the first question teams ask relates to access to curriculum, this question addresses the educational setting for the child.

Now that we've talked in general about educational performance, let's look specifically at the possible adverse effects of hearing impairment on a child's education.

[Slides 13-17] Characteristics and Educational Impact

[Slide 13] We're going to highlight some of the developmental areas that are commonly impacted by hearing impairment to help teams identify characteristics that may suggest that a child has hearing impairment. As we discuss the different areas, we will highlight characteristics and educational impact for both preschool-aged and school-aged children with hearing impairment. Although we're examining the same developmental areas for both age groups, the characteristics may be manifested in different ways depending on the developmental level of the child and the demands of the environment. It is important to recognize that the effects of hearing impairment will vary considerably, depending in large

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part upon the interaction between the child's characteristics, and the school, family, and community supports.

To identify the educational impact for a child with hearing impairment, the EDT must examine the demands of various settings and environments and the child's abilities to meet those demands by addressing the question of "How do the characteristics of the disability manifest in the child's natural environments (including home, classroom, recess, and others)?" This determination needs to be made at a very individual level for each child and must be based on comprehensive information about the child and his environments, including information gained from observing a child's functional and academic performance across a variety of settings.

[Slide 14] The characteristics under the category of hearing impairment are organized around three domains: communication, social/emotional, and academics. These domains each include a range of skills that may be impacted by hearing impairment.

[Slide 15] When we are looking at the domain of communication, children with hearing impairment may display deficits in expressive communication, receptive communication, or both. Expressive communication deficits may include difficulties verbally communicating with others, communicating wants and needs in a way that can be understood, and producing the sounds needed to speak clearly to others. Deficits in receptive language may include difficulty understanding other people when they speak and difficulties accessing language in the home, school, and community.

[Slide 16] Children with hearing impairment may also demonstrate difficulties with social/emotional skills related to their impairment. A large part of communication and interpersonal relationship development is related to receiving and responding to verbal information. Many young children with hearing impairment will have difficulty participating in these verbal interactions, which may lead to difficulty developing age-appropriate social skills such as turn-taking, repairing breakdowns in communication, playing with others, and engaging in conversations with peers and adults. Because of their communication difficulties, some children with hearing impairments may also demonstrate challenging behaviors.

[Slide 17] Finally, children with hearing impairment may have deficits in pre-academic or academic activities. Because of their difficulty accessing verbal information, they may demonstrate delays in skills such as reading, and they may develop academic achievement deficits. In addition, older children with hearing impairments may have limited vocational options due to limited communication skills.

Please refer to the "Characteristics and Educational Impact" section of the NM TEAM and remember that the characteristics presented in NM TEAM are not meant to be exhaustive nor is the NM TEAM suggesting that all children with hearing impairment will demonstrate all of the presented characteristics. It is important for teams to recognize that these characteristics may lead to limited

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opportunities for engaging in age-appropriate activities, opportunities to be educated with peers, and the learning that accompanies these activities.

[Slides 18-20] Special Considerations for Assessment

[Slide 18] It is important for EDTs to be aware of issues related to evaluating young children and children with known or suspected disabilities, regardless of the eligibility categories being considered. For example, when evaluating young children, it is imperative that the impact of the family, home environment, home language, and developmental history be considered. Specifically, EDTs must determine that a possible lack of exposure to developmentally appropriate activities is not the **primary** reason for the child's difficulties. In addition, for a child with a known or suspected disability, evaluators must ensure that the assessment results accurately reflect the areas being assessed. For example, be careful that you are not measuring the child's sensory, motor, or speaking skills, unless those are the skills you wish to assess. Please review NM TEAM section 6 for more information on these issues.

Like all of the eligibility categories, hearing impairment has unique characteristics that can influence the evaluation process. Assessment results must accurately reflect the child's abilities being measured, rather than other skills, which is particularly relevant for children with suspected hearing impairment. It is important that the evaluators take steps to ensure that the child's hearing abilities don't inadvertently impact the assessment results. Evaluators are encouraged to consult with a person who is trained in educating children with hearing impairments to ensure that the test instruments and any modifications used are appropriate.

[Slide 19] During the initial stages of an evaluation of a child with a hearing impairment, evaluators must determine the methods that the child uses for both expressive and receptive communication and his level of competence with each method. This will help determine what assessment methods will provide the most accurate representation of the child's skills. In addition, teams should ensure that their evaluation of the child includes information that will guide them in determining if the child needs amplification or the use of an interpreter. This information can be used to guide assessment decisions, and to identify accommodations and supports necessary so that the child can participate appropriately in his educational environment.

[Slide 20] For some children with a hearing impairment, it would be most appropriate to use an interpreter throughout the evaluation process. It is essential that evaluators use licensed interpreters for the deaf and that they ensure that the interpreter is being used appropriately to support the evaluation process. You can find more information about the use of licensed interpreters for the deaf in the Hearing Impairment, including deafness, section of the NM TEAM.

Finally, whenever possible, if standardized measures are used to assess children with hearing impairments, the measures selected should be normed on children with hearing impairments. For some children, measures normed on children without hearing impairments may be appropriate, but all evaluators must ensure that the child's communication skills are appropriate for the tests selected. In this case, the scores should be interpreted with caution and be used primarily for descriptive purposes.

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[Slides 21-22] Initial Evaluation: Hearing Impairment, including Deafness

[Slide 21] To answer the questions on the eligibility determination worksheets and make eligibility decisions, it is important to discuss the evaluation components that are outlined in the NM TEAM. A number of the components are the same across most, if not all, of the eligibility categories. These components are outlined and discussed in the Conducting Initial Evaluations Module.

Highly recommended evaluation components for hearing impairment are listed on the screen in front of you and in the NM TEAM under the hearing impairment section. All of the highly recommended components are important and should be addressed in an evaluation, but some of the elements need to be discussed in a bit more depth to help evaluators more clearly understand the component within the context of hearing impairment.

Please remember that the assessments chosen must be tailored to assess specific areas of suspected disability and educational need. Assessment of children for whom hearing impairment is suspected should be multidisciplinary and comprehensive and conducted by individuals experienced in evaluating individuals with hearing impairment. There is no single definitive assessment for suspected hearing impairment. Thus, the use of multiple tools, as well as the professional judgment and skill of the professionals who conducted the evaluation, will ensure accurate findings. Please remember that the NM TEAM provides information about common characteristics of children with hearing impairment—this information can help EDTs identify if hearing impairment may be an appropriate eligibility category for consideration.

Let's start by talking about the information gathered during a review of existing data, the child's history, and direct observations of the child's behavior. When evaluating a child for suspected hearing impairment, EDTs should look for information regarding the interaction between the child's hearing skills and his performance and participation in activities at home and at school. In addition, information regarding the cause of the hearing loss, the age of onset, and amount of residual hearing is essential. For example, the age of onset of the child's hearing loss is an important consideration, as children who developed a hearing loss before developing language skills will likely have very different needs than a child who developed a hearing loss after his language skills were well established.

Additionally, EDTs must obtain a current and comprehensive audiological evaluation from a licensed audiologist. This written report should include information regarding the degree and type of hearing loss, both with and without amplification, as well as information about the child's functional use of hearing.

Because of the close link between hearing and language, a comprehensive evaluation of a child with a hearing impairment should include assessments of speech, language, and communication. This assessment should evaluate how the child's hearing impairment has influenced the development and functional use of his oral speech and receptive, expressive, and social language.

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EDTs should recognize that the academic performance of children with hearing impairment may or may not be impacted. Some children with hearing impairment may perform well on standards-based assessments, standardized academic achievement tests, and other assessments, but may have significant difficulty participating in learning activities with their peers and adults. Evaluators should consult with teachers who are experienced in teaching children with hearing impairments, including deafness, regarding test materials and methods to use to assess a child's academic achievement skills in order to obtain the most accurate representation of the child's academic skills without inadvertently placing too much emphasis on the child's hearing skills. In addition, EDTs must understand that a child does not need to demonstrate academic achievement deficits to be found eligible for special education and related services under the category of hearing impairment, but they do need to show significant educational impact.

[Slide 22] Finally, it is important to recognize that decisions regarding transition assessments need to be highly individualized for each child and situation. In New Mexico, transition planning must be documented on the first IEP in effect when the child turns 14 or during their 8th grade year, whichever comes sooner. This type of transition planning specifically relates to the child's progression from the public schools to post-secondary settings. However, EDTs should recognize first that this planning may need to start earlier for some children and second, that transitions occur throughout a child's school tenure. For example, children transition from preschool to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, between schools, and so on. EDTs should ensure that they have the information necessary to support children through all of these critical transitions, as appropriate for each individual child.

[Slide 23] Potential Additional Components

It is the responsibility of the team to answer any questions that may arise throughout the evaluation process, including what eligibility category best describes the child's primary disability and what supports and services the child needs. The highly recommended evaluation components that we've discussed should help teams answer many of the questions that they might have, but in some situations, teams may require additional information. NM TEAM presents a list of potential additional components that can be found in the Initial Evaluation section of the NM TEAM category of hearing impairment. This list may be helpful as teams make eligibility determination decisions, but should not be considered as the only additional areas that the EDT may wish to explore. We will talk about a few of those components now.

One of the potential additional components for an evaluation under the category of hearing impairment is an assessment of visual perceptual skills. Because children with hearing impairments rely more heavily on their vision to compensate for their hearing, it may be necessary to assess their visual perceptual skills in order to develop an appropriate educational program.

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Another potential additional component under this category is motor skills. This may be a particularly important part of the evaluation for a child who is learning sign language, in order to ensure that they receive the appropriate supports they need while learning this additional language.

Please refer to the NM TEAM for a complete list of potential additional components.

[Slide 24-36] Eligibility Determination Process for Hearing Impairment, including Deafness

[Slide 24] Before we examine criteria that are specific to the eligibility determination decision for hearing impairment, we would like to remind you that general information regarding the eligibility process and use of the eligibility determination worksheets is presented in the module, “Eligibility Determination and Use of Eligibility Determination Worksheets.” We encourage you to listen to that module and to review the information presented in the NM TEAM in “Section Six. Essential Components of Eligibility Determination.”

For this discussion, you will find it helpful to refer specifically to the “Eligibility Determination” and “Eligibility Determination Worksheets” sections within the hearing impairment chapter of the NM TEAM.

To determine that a child is eligible for special education and related services as a child with hearing impairment, an EDT must first determine that the child is a child with a disability, and second that the child demonstrates a need for specialized instruction as a result of his disability.

[Slide 25] The Eligibility Determination Worksheets are structured to guide the EDT in making these decisions. They provide a detailed road map to guide teams not only in working through the process, but also in documenting their decisions. We will use the hearing impairment worksheet as a guide for the rest of this discussion.

[Slide 26] First, the EDT must document relevant identifying information and the assessment and evaluation data they have collected and will be using in the eligibility determination process. This information should reflect data collected from multiple data sources.

[Slide 27] Second, under the “Determine the presence of a disability” section, the EDT will address four questions that specifically relate to determining if a child has hearing impairment.

[Slide 28] The first two questions, questions 1 and 2, which are consistent across almost all of the eligibility categories, require that the EDT discuss determinant factors related to the child’s performance, specifically the lack of appropriate instruction in reading and math, as well as limited English proficiency. Essentially EDTs must consider all of the factors contributing to the child’s difficulties and decide which factors are the primary cause or causes of the child’s difficulties. Like all decisions, these decisions must be made based on comprehensive evaluation data and with the input of all of the members of the EDT. It is important that EDTs recognize that a child may have experienced a lack of appropriate instruction and/or have limited English proficiency, but if these factors are not the primary

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reasons for the child's difficulties, they would not be considered determinant factors. Once the EDT has ruled out either of these factors, they check "Yes" on the Worksheet. This communicates that "Yes, they have eliminated the possibility that one of these factors is a determinant factor." If the EDT is considering more than one potential eligibility category, these first two questions would be answered the same and use the same documentation across all of the categories. EDTs may find it useful to complete multiple worksheets simultaneously if they are considering more than one eligibility category. Additionally, EDTs should remember that lack of appropriate instruction for preschool-aged children is considered to be a lack of opportunities to participate in developmentally appropriate activities. It is important to remember that the lack of opportunities must be due to a reason other than the nature of the child's disability in order for it to be considered a determinant factor. For example, it may be that a young child has significant behavioral challenges that make it difficult for the family to involve the child in family and community activities. In this situation, even though the child has had a lack of opportunity to participate in these activities, EDTs should not consider this as the determinant factor for the child's learning difficulties. Rather, this information might be helpful and used as further documentation to support a decision that indicates that a child is eligible for special education and related services.

[Slide 29] The third question, question 3, is unique to hearing impairment. To respond to this question, the team must determine that the child is a child with hearing impairment, as defined by IDEA based on assessment and evaluation data collected by the EDT. EDTs should remember that medical information provided by parents and outside agencies, including the audiological evaluation, may help answer this question, but it would only answer the question, "Does this child have hearing impairment?" The medical information would not necessarily support that the child also requires specially designed instruction as a result of the hearing impairment. That question will be answered by the EDT later.

[Slide 30] The fourth and final question to be addressed is also consistent across all eligibility categories, like the questions related to the determinant factors. In this case, the EDT is determining if any other eligibility category better describes the child's disability. It is possible that a child demonstrates more than one disability, but if the EDT determines that hearing impairment **best** describes the child's disability, they would respond, "Yes, we've determined that no other category better describes the child's disability." On the other hand, if the child has hearing impairment but also has another disability and the other disability better describes the child, the EDT would answer, "No, we've determined that another category better describes this child's disability." In either case, it is likely that the EDT will need to complete the "Determine the presence of a disability" section on one or more worksheets for the other eligibility categories being considered.

In addition to answering each of the questions "yes" or "no" in this section, it is critical that the EDT briefly describe the documentation that supported each of their decisions.

[Slide 31] Each of the four questions serves as a stopping point in the process if the EDT answers "no." Once the EDT has answered "no" to any of the four questions, they have determined that the child is not a child with hearing impairment. If this occurs, the EDT should stop moving through those four

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questions. If the EDT either is not considering another potential eligibility category or has already completed the “Determine the presence of a disability” section for other potential categories, the EDT should move to the “Determination of eligibility for special education and related services” section of the worksheet. At this point, the EDT will document the determination that “The child is not eligible under the eligibility category of hearing impairment.” They also need to indicate why that decision was reached by indicating either that the child doesn’t have hearing impairment or that a different category best describes the child’s disability. The process then stops for this eligibility category.

[Slide 32] The response to all of the four questions in this section of the worksheet must be “yes” in order to proceed to the section of the worksheet, “Determination of the need for specially designed instruction.” Remember, if you have even one “no” response, you skip over the “Determination of the need for specially designed instruction” section.

[Slide 33] To determine the need for specially designed instruction, using the assessment and evaluation data collected, the EDT must determine if, as a result of hearing impairment, the child requires special education and related services in one or more areas outlined in IDEA. These areas include: being involved in and making progress in the general education curriculum or developmentally appropriate activities; participating in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and/or being educated and participating with other children with and without disabilities. The EDT must answer “yes” to at least one of the questions in this section of the worksheet to say that the child requires specially designed instruction because of needs resulting from hearing impairment.

[Slide 34] After answering these three questions, the EDT moves into the final phase of the eligibility determination process—documenting the final eligibility determination decision. This section of the worksheet, “Determination of eligibility for special education and related services,” allows EDTs to document that either the child is eligible for special education and related services under the category of hearing impairment, is not eligible under the category of hearing impairment, or that more information needs to be collected to make a determination.

[Slide 35] If the EDT determines that the results of the evaluation indicate that the child requires specially designed instruction as a result of hearing impairment, the child would be eligible under the category of hearing impairment.

[Slide 36] If the EDT determines that the child is not eligible under the category of hearing impairment, they must indicate the rationale for that decision by checking one of the four options within that decision. These options allow EDTs to document either that the child doesn’t have hearing impairment or any other disability, that the child does not have hearing impairment, but is eligible under another eligibility category, that the child has hearing impairment but another eligibility category better describes the child’s primary disability, or that the child has hearing impairment, but doesn’t demonstrate a need for specially designed instruction. This section allows for the documentation that a different eligibility category better describes the primary disability.

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EDTs should clearly read the questions presented on the worksheet and determine which situation most accurately describes the child being evaluated. Any child who is found to be “not eligible” for special education and related services must be referred to the SAT.

Finally, if the EDT is unable to make an eligibility determination, they may identify additional information that need to be gathered. They would then reconvene later to make the final eligibility determination decision.

[Slide 37] Reevaluation and Discontinuation of Services

The Reevaluation worksheets in the NM TEAM will support the EDT through the documentation and decision-making process during reevaluations.

A child with hearing impairment should be considered for discontinuation of special education and related services only when they demonstrate the ability to function independently, access and perform adequately in the general curriculum, and no longer demonstrate a need for special education services. The LEA must evaluate the child before determining that the child is no longer a child with a disability. Any child whose special education supports and services are discontinued should be referred back to the SAT at his school to ensure that the child is supported during the transition and a Section 504 Accommodation Plan should be considered, as appropriate.

[Slide 38] Closing

Thank you for participating in this NM TEAM training module. We hope this information has been helpful in clarifying and expanding on the information presented in the manual.