

Critical Questions About the Special Education Process for Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse Learners

When learners who are Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse (CLD) are referred for special education it is necessary to use caution so as not to discriminate because of language or cultural differences. The following questions provide a framework for considering the relationship of culture and language to a possible disability as the child moves through the Special Education process.

Before a formal referral is made to Special Education

Ask: Is this an appropriate referral? Have we answered the following questions satisfactorily?

- Has the student had appropriate support, structure, instruction for sufficient time, with enough intensity, to acquire necessary language, academic, and behavioral skills?
- Have we used appropriate accommodations in the classroom?
- Have we considered the child's academic history and personal experiences?

Before beginning the assessment process

Ask: Have we considered the important factors to design the assessment?

- What do we already know? What do we want to learn?
- What are the English language skills of this student? How do we know?
- Which informal tools will be useful? Who will use them?
- Are there appropriate tests in this child's native language? Are the norms appropriate? Does the child require the tests in his/her first language?
- If we will use an interpreter, who will it be? Has he/she been trained in the special education assessment process and interpreting procedures?
- Have parents received notification of rights and procedural safeguards in a language they understand?

Before determining eligibility for special education

Ask: Do we have sufficient, unbiased information to make a decision?

- Can diversity or language factors be ruled out as a **primary** cause of the student's difficulties?
- Can we document that there is a disability (most likely without the use of standardized test scores)?
- Does the student need special education services to benefit from the general education curriculum?
- Will parents need an interpreter for the staffing?

Before designing services

Ask: How will we coordinate to meet the complex needs of this child?

- What are the language needs of this child?
- Who will be involved in meeting the language and the special education needs of this child?
- How will these folks collaborate?
- Where will services be delivered?
- Who will monitor progress for which areas?
- Have we ensured that parents were knowledgeable partners in decision making and planning?