

## **Environmental/Cultural Differences and Economic Disadvantage Assessment**

To determine if a child is eligible for special education, the public agency must first rule out cultural differences, environmental differences, and economic disadvantages as the determinant factor affecting the child's academic or functional performance.

### **Cultural Differences**

Cultural differences are present for any child who is not a member of the dominant culture, even if they are natural-born citizens. When ruling-out cultural differences as the determinant factor, the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET) should review the disaggregated results of achievement data which compare performance among subgroups (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender) in the district. This disaggregated data might indicate that most children of a particular cultural or ethnic group are achieving at acceptable levels in response to the instruction they are receiving. For example, if a particular child is receiving the same instruction in a similar learning environment but not achieving commensurate with the child's cultural or ethnic group with similar levels of acculturation, the child's learning difficulties are unlikely to be due to cultural factors.

Cultural differences affect the learning of children in two ways (Hamayan et.al, 2007). First, culture provides the context for making sense of the world through which all new learning is filtered. The way children and their families understand or interpret educational content or the learning process will vary according to their culture. Second, culture can affect the child's general level of comfort about his/her place in the school environment. The child's and family's level of acculturation should be determined using an acculturation measure as membership in a particular ethnic group or length of time in the U.S. cannot be equated with level of acculturation. Interviews with families will be important to gather information regarding cultural differences and adjustment to the culture of the school, which may be impacting student learning.

Cultural difference considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Child's cultural background is different from the (dominant or primary) culture of the school, community, and/or larger society;
- Child has had limited experiences in culture of the school;
- Child has had limited involvement in organizations and activities of any culture.

*For more information refer to: Rhodes, R. L., Ochoa, S. H., & Ortiz, S. O. Assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students: A practical guide.*

### **Environmental Differences and Economic Disadvantages**

Children who attend a school, as with the general population, will represent a diversity of family compositions, environmental conditions, and socioeconomic groups. When ruling out environmental differences and economic disadvantages as the determinant factor, the MET should review the disaggregated results of district achievement test data which compare the performance of children of similar socioeconomic status and

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race/ethnicity in the district, as well as conducting interviews with the family and collecting developmental histories. Families will play a large role in determining whether environmental or socioeconomic factors play a primary role in a child's learning difficulties. Family interviews and developmental histories can assist in gathering the necessary information to determine any effects of environmental differences or economic disadvantage.

Environmental difference considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Patterns of school attendance;
- Mobility within and across school districts;
- Extent of social networks and systems of support;
- Family history that may impact school performance (e.g., divorce, stress, trauma, etc.).

Economic disadvantage considerations include, but not limited to:

- Family is low income at subsistence level;
- Child resides in a depressed economic area;
- Child receives public assistance.

*NOTE: Economic factors are to be considered but do not necessarily determine the child's achievement or lack thereof. Public agencies must recognize that there are cultural/ environmental differences and economic disadvantages among children; however, the public agency must determine that those differences/disadvantages are NOT the determinant factor for the child's lack of progress in the general education curriculum.*

## **Environmental/Cultural Differences and Economic Disadvantage Assessment**

The *Environmental/Cultural Differences and Economic Disadvantage Assessment* documents the decision of Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET) of whether or not environmental/cultural and/or economic factors are the determinant factor(s) for the child's educational difficulties. The MET will review all of the information gathered throughout the evaluation process, including the *Developmental History* (Appendix EE.H-A or Appendix EE.H-B), *Teacher Narrative* (Appendix EE.I), and parent and teacher interviews, for any evidence of environmental/cultural and/or economic factors including differences in opportunity, motivation, and/or attendance that may have impacted the child's educational performance. The *Environmental/Cultural Differences and Economic Disadvantage Assessment*, or a similar assessment or a form containing similar information, is recommended for use when conducting a comprehensive evaluation or reevaluation for all disability categories.

**ENVIRONMENTAL/CULTURAL DIFFERENCES  
AND ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE ASSESSMENT**

*Document all information gathered throughout the evaluation process that would describe the impact of environmental or economic factors on the child's educational difficulties. As a team, decide if any of the following are the determinant factor (i.e., the primary cause of) the child's educational difficulties.*

LACK OF OPPORTUNITY		COMMENTS
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Did the child receive high quality early childhood education and/or experiences?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Was the child delayed in entering formal education?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Did the child receive high quality instruction upon entering formal education?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Does the child have access to educational resources or experiences in the home?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Do caregivers provide instructional support?	
<i>Provide any additional evidence that lack of opportunity impacts the child's educational difficulties:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of opportunity appears to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties. <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of opportunity does <u>not</u> appear to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties.		
CULTURAL FACTORS		COMMENTS
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Is the child a member of a minority group in the composition of the school district?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Is the child isolated or had limited experiences with majority populations (e.g., limited participation in community activities or organizations)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Are the cultural expectations for the child and the child's family in conflict with the cultural expectations for the majority population?	
<i>Provide any additional evidence that cultural factors impact the child's educational difficulties:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural factors appear to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties. <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural factors do <u>not</u> appear to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties.		

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<b>LACK OF ATTENDANCE</b>		<b>COMMENTS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Does the child have a high absentee rate due to illness, disciplinary issues, or other factors?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Has the child's attendance at multiple schools impacted the child's ability to access adequate instruction on a consistent manner sufficient to make academic gains?	
<i>Provide any additional evidence that lack of attendance impacts the child's educational difficulties:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of attendance appears to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties. <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of attendance does <u>not</u> appear to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties.		
<b>SITUATIONAL TRAUMA</b>		<b>COMMENTS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Has the child's academic performance fallen significantly in the last six (6) to twelve (12) months?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Is there knowledge of any situations within the child's family that would contribute to a drop in academic performance?	
<i>Provide any additional evidence that situational trauma impacts the child's educational difficulties:</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Situational trauma appears to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties. <input type="checkbox"/> Situational trauma does <u>not</u> appear to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties.		
<b>ECONOMIC FACTORS</b>		<b>COMMENTS</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Does the child qualify for free or reduced lunch?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Does the child's family receive public assistance (e.g., TANF)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Has there been a recent disruption in the family's employment status?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	Has there been economic hardship (e.g., bankruptcy, foreclosure, illness)?	
<i>Are there any other economic factors that may be impacting the child's educational difficulties?</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic factors appear to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties. <input type="checkbox"/> Economic factors do <u>not</u> appear to be the determinant factor for the child's educational difficulties.		