

Bureau of Special Education (BSE) Topic Brief: Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Special Education under Developmental Delay April 2026

Introduction

This guidance document from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is designed to support educators in accurately identifying and determining eligibility for special education services under the Developmental Delay (DD) category for children ages 3 through 8.

Eligibility Definition

Developmental delay is an eligibility category in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that may be used for certain children in a specific age group who are experiencing developmental delays, as determined and defined under state law. ([34 Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\), §300.8\(b\)](#))

Under Connecticut General Statutes §10-76a and §10-76d, a child requiring special education includes: “A child age three through eight, inclusive, who is experiencing a developmental delay that causes such child to require special education.” (As amended in 2024, extending eligibility from age 3 through 5 to age 3 through 8.)

The statute refers to a significant delay in one or more of the following areas:

- a) Physical development (motor abilities, vision, hearing)
- b) Communication development (talking and understanding)
- c) Cognitive development (problem solving and reasoning)
- d) Social-emotional development (behavior and social interaction)
- e) Adaptive development (self-care and daily living skills)

Connecticut State Department of Education Guidance on Determining Developmental Delay

The following sections describe the criteria used to identify and determine eligibility for special education and related services under DD and provide recommended practices for conducting evaluations and best practices for identifying DD.

Comprehensive Evaluation Requirements

A comprehensive evaluation must be completed to determine whether the child meets criteria for a developmental delay. When conducting a comprehensive evaluation, the IDEA ([34 CFR, §300.304](#)) requires the planning and placement team (PPT) team to:

- Draw upon multiple sources of data, which may include standardized assessments, criterion-referenced measures, curriculum-based assessments, observations, developmental checklists, parent input, and teacher/provider reports.
- Be culturally and linguistically responsive.
- Ensure assessments are administered by qualified personnel.
- Assess all areas of suspected disability.

No single measure or assessment score may be used as the sole criterion for determining eligibility. The district should also clearly document the child’s strengths, the specific area(s) of developmental delay, the sources of data and the educational impact of the delay in the report.

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Guidance for Identifying Significant Developmental Delay

To determine eligibility under this category, multiple sources of data must demonstrate that the child has a significant developmental delay that results in a need for specially designed instruction in order to access a free appropriate public education (FAPE). This determination must be supported through one of the following three options:

1. Data from appropriate norm-referenced and developmental measures show that the child performs at least two standard deviations below the mean, or at or below the 2nd percentile (considering the standard error of measurement), in **one area** of development and is supported by additional evidence, such as interviews, observations, or other qualitative data that confirm the delay in that developmental area.
2. Data from appropriate norm-referenced and developmental measures show that the child performs at least 1.5 standard deviations below the mean, or at or below the 7th percentile (considering the standard error of measurement), in **two or more** areas of development and is supported by additional evidence, such as interviews, observations, or other qualitative data that confirm the delays in the areas identified.
3. A comprehensive body of evidence drawn from multiple direct and indirect sources, including play-based assessments, parent input, interviews, observations, work samples, checklists, and other formal and informal measures, clearly documents a history and pattern of atypical development. This pattern must be shown to significantly impede the child's performance and progress across settings when compared to age-appropriate expectations and developmental milestones in one or more areas of development.

Adverse Educational Impact and Need for Specially Designed Instruction

If a student meets the above criteria and is found eligible for special education and related services under the primary disability category of Developmental Delay, the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) must explicitly link the identified significant delay in present levels of performance.

The PPT must clearly document:

- How the developmental delay affects participation in age-appropriate activities or access to learning environments;
- The relationship between evaluation data and educational performance; and
- Why specially designed instruction is necessary to address the identified needs.

Age Parameters

- Eligibility for Developmental Delay applies to students ages 3 through 8.
- A student may not remain identified under Developmental Delay upon reaching age nine.

Key Takeaways for Connecticut Educators and Related Service Providers

- Eligibility under the primary disability category of Developmental Delay requires both a significant delay and a documented need for specially designed instruction.
- Eligibility determinations must be comprehensive, data-based, and educationally relevant.
- Test scores alone do not determine eligibility.
- Adverse educational impact and instructional need must be clearly documented.
- The IEP must demonstrate a direct connection between evaluation findings and the student's need for specially designed instruction.

PPT Worksheet for Determination of Eligibility for Special Education and Related Services under the Primary Disability Category of Developmental Delay

For a student to be eligible for special education and related services under the primary disability category of Developmental Delay (DD), a **Yes** response from the PPT is required for all components below.

Requirement	Guiding Question	Yes	No	Documentation
Age Requirement	Is the child between ages 3 through 8 (inclusive)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Comprehensive Evaluation	Was a comprehensive evaluation conducted using multiple sources of data and administered by qualified personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Area of Delay Identified	Does the evaluation document a significant delay in at least one developmental area or moderate delays in two or more areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Data-Based Determination	Is the determination supported by multiple measures (not a single test score)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Adverse Educational Impact	Does the delay adversely affect participation in developmentally appropriate activities and/or progress in the general education curriculum?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Need for Specially Designed Instruction	Does the child require specially designed instruction (not solely accommodations, general education supports, or related services alone)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Exclusionary Factors Considered	Have other causes/contributing factors such as medical problems, environmental or cultural factors been ruled out as the primary cause of the child's educational difficulties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Note: If the student is eligible, the IEP must clearly link the evaluation findings to present levels of performance, goals, and specially designed instruction.