**Introduction to the Sociocultural Checklist and Guide**

The *Sociocultural Checklist* is designed to summarize information known about diversity factors including race and culture, communication styles, socioeconomic factors, and factors such as life experiences and family issues. The checklist can be completed through using information gathered through intervention monitoring forms, *Home and Family Interview* form, record review and other sources. *The checklist itself is not meant to be used as a family interview device.*

In Minnesota, many American Indian and African American families are impacted by socioeconomic problems and language differences. Although many families and students living in difficult circumstances survive and thrive, research has shown that socioeconomic factors can contribute to a lack of success in school for some students.

When students are experiencing problems in school, cultural and socioeconomic factors should be investigated and the information used in planning interventions for students, or determining eligibility for special education placement when eligibility determinations are necessary.

*The Sociocultural Checklist* is also designed to assist schools in documenting that they have systematically gathered information and ruled out race and culture, communication differences, or socioeconomic and other diversity factors as the primary cause of a student’s academic difficulties. *The Sociocultural Checklist* is accompanied by the *Sociocultural Guide*. The guide discusses how diversity factors affect children in school and can be used as a resource in planning interventions. The *Sociocultural Guide* also suggests assessment accommodations and thus serves as a tool in the assessment process as well.
Sociocultural Checklist

1. Student Information

Name (optional):_________________ Date of Birth:_________________
Age:_________________ Grade:_________________
School:_________________

2. Respondent Information

Name (optional):_________________ Position:_________________
Date:_________________ Relationship to Student:_________________
School:_________________

Assessment Completed By:_________________ Date:_________________

Instructions for Use: Using your knowledge of this student obtained through observations, record review, and parent contacts, complete the Sociocultural Checklist by placing a check by all statements that apply. When completed, refer to the Sociocultural Guide to review pertinent information and/or research with regard to each statement checked.

A. Racial/Cultural Factors

☐ 1. The student is racially different from the majority of peers and staff in this school.

☐ 2. The student’s family participates regularly in events or social groups within their race/cultural group and/or the family is an enrolled member of a recognized American Indian tribe.

☐ 3. The student seldom interacts with peers or staff of other racial/cultural backgrounds or has poor relations with peers and staff of other racial/cultural backgrounds.

☐ 4. The student’s culture values support of family or group over individual effort.

☐ 5. The student recently moved from another town, city, state, or country. The student and his/her family are recent immigrants, refugees, or migrants. The student and his/her family reside on a reservation.

☐ 6. The student demonstrates behavior or survival strategies that are culturally appropriate or appropriate to a previous environment but that are different from the expectations of the current environment.

☐ 7. There is no support in the home for bicultural development.
**Behavioral Factors**

1. The student displays confusion in locus of control.

2. The student displays heightened stress or anxiety in cross-cultural interactions.

3. The student expresses or displays sense of isolation or alienation in cross-cultural interactions.

**Cognitive/Learning Factors**

1. The student displays few cognitive learning strategies that are appropriate to the classroom/school.

2. The student’s cognitive learning style is different or inappropriate in relation to teacher’s instructional style.

3. The student retains learning strategies that are no longer appropriate.

**Experiential Factors**

1. The student has limited or sporadic school attendance.

2. The student has had little exposure to subject or content or is not familiar with material.

3. The student’s early childhood development was disrupted.

4. The student does not know how to behave in the classroom.

5. The student uses/ knows different terms/concepts for subject areas or materials and content.
B. Communication Factors

☐ 1. There is a language, dialect, or communication style other than standard English spoken by family members in the student’s home.
☐ 2. The student has a language, dialect or communication style other than standard English.
☐ 3. There is no support in the home for bilingual development.
☐ 4. The student does not speak English.
☐ 5. The student has limited academic language in native language.
☐ 6. The student has limited social language in English.
☐ 7. The student rarely speaks in class.
☐ 8. The student only speaks to culturally similar peers.
☐ 9. The student has limited academic language in English.
☐ 10. The student asks a peer for assistance in understanding information presented in class.
☐ 11. The student appears to know English but cannot follow English directions in class.
C. Socioeconomic Factors

☐ 1. The student is currently homeless or lacks adequate clothing, housing, and/or nutrition.
☐ 2. The student’s parents or caregivers do not have a high school diploma or GED.

D. Resiliency Factors

☐ 1. The student has special strengths, talents, or interests.
   Describe: ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

☐ 2. The student is involved in school and/or community activities.
   Describe: ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

☐ 3. The student has a mentor or a positive adult role model.
   Describe: ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

☐ 4. The family has a support network.
   Describe: ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

E. Other Factors

☐ 1. The student’s family is very mobile (has moved more than once during the current school year or has a pattern of moving at least once a year over several years).
☐ 2. The student’s previous education has been sporadic, limited, or very different from the current school.
☐ 3. The student’s parents or caregivers demonstrate a negative history or attitude toward school.
☐ 4. The student’s primary caregiver has changed within the last year.
☐ 5. The student has recently experienced a crisis or trauma.
☐ 6. The student expresses or displays a sense of stress, anxiety, isolation, or alienation.
Sociocultural Guide

A. Race/Cultural Factors

1. The student is racially different from the majority of peers and staff in this school.

Research in other states suggests that there is a correlation between minority status and academic success, special referral and placement. Minority students enrolled in schools where students and staff are predominantly white are more likely to be referred to special education than are students enrolled in schools with diverse populations. A student in this situation may feel a great deal of stress and isolation that affects their classroom performance as well as their performance on special education assessments.

2. The student’s family participates regularly in events or social groups within their race/cultural group and/or the family is an enrolled member of a recognized American Indian tribe.

Tribal enrollment and participation in community cultural events are indicators of how closely the family identifies with their cultural or racial group. Among American Indians, families who participate in traditional spiritual practices, pow-wows or other events are more likely to have values or characteristics that are traditional to American Indian people. Student and family orientation to traditional beliefs should be considered when determining whether published norms are adequate and when interpreting assessment results. The student's and family’s participation in cultural events may also demonstrate their access to a support system. This information can also be useful in planning instruction and interventions.

3. The student seldom interacts with peers or staff of other racial/cultural backgrounds or has poor relations with peers and staff or other racial/ cultural backgrounds.

The team should investigate the reason for the lack of interaction when interviewing the student and family to determine whether there are racial issues that are affecting the student’s behavior or academic performance. Also, if the student prefers to interact with members of his/her own cultural group and/or is antagonistic toward others from a different cultural group, assessors of different races may need to make extra efforts to establish the rapport needed to carry out a comprehensive assessment.

4. The student’s culture values support of family or group over individual effort.

Students from some cultural backgrounds are uncomfortable when expected to perform individually in class or to compete with classmates. One-on-one assessments may also be uncomfortable for students whose families hold traditional values that encourage group cohesion and discourage individual performance or displays of skills. Classroom teachers should provide a mix of small group opportunities if they are concerned that some children are reluctant to compete individually. In an assessment, staff should explain the purpose of the individual assessment and take time to get to know the student and develop rapport (perhaps assess over more than one session if the student appears very
uncomfortable). In addition, assessors should plan ways to gather pertinent information by observing the student in a group setting with peers of a similar racial/cultural background as well as individually.

5. **The student recently moved from another town, city or state (specify point of origin and determine similarity or differences with current setting).**

The academic or behavioral problems the student exhibits may be the by-product of adjusting to a new environment. Check to see how long the student has been enrolled and whether assistance was provided to help the student adapt. When interviewing the parents and the student, try to learn as much as possible about the academic and behavioral norms in the previous schools and to determine if the student experienced similar difficulties. Also ask about the reason for the move and whether the student came voluntarily or involuntarily.

6. **The student and his/her family recently moved from another area but retain behavior or survival strategies that are not adapted to the current environment.**

Families who have moved from stressful environments may have developed survival strategies that are no longer needed in their current situation. Families may not be aware of the behavioral norms of their current situation or of how others perceive their actions. Caregivers prior experiences may impact their child-rearing or discipline strategies in ways that negatively impact their child’s ability to succeed in school. For example, a family who previously lived in a dangerous neighborhood may not allow their children to play outside even after they move to a setting that is generally safe. This can cause problems if teachers expect students to gather wild plants for a science project, interview neighbors for social studies projects, or engage in similar activities where accessing the community is expected. The mismatch between the parent’s expectations and the schools can also create emotional stress and confusion for the child. When interviewing the family, the team should ask about their previous experiences.

Students who have moved from stressful environments may also have developed survival strategies that are no longer needed in their current situation. Students may exhibit behavior problems in school that are rooted in their prior experiences (examples, hoarding food or school supplies, startle responses to loud noises, hypervigilence, unwillingness to take turns). Students may not be aware of the behavioral norms of their current situation or of how others perceive their actions. As a first step, all students and staff should be aware of how behavior and social interactions differ in different environments. Students in this situation are in need of intervention to explain the written and unwritten rules of behavior and social interaction in order to help them adjust. The ability to learn and to adapt to new environments is an attribute of intelligence and good mental health. Failure to adapt despite appropriate interventions is a possible indicator of a disability. Assessors should work with the family to determine whether the student’s behavior can be attributed to the past environment and whether the student has responded to efforts to help adjust to the new environment.
B. Communication Factors

1. **There is language, dialect or communication style other than Standard English spoken by family members in the student’s home.**

   Even though the student appears to be English-speaking, the use of another language by caretakers can affect the student’s development of English. Further information about language use and influences in the home should be gathered using the communications section of the family interview, if not already done. While the family may be supportive of education, their use of another language or dialect at home may inhibit their ability to provide support for the student’s education through reading, homework help, and so forth.

2. **The student has a language, dialect or communication style other than Standard English.**

   The student’s use of another language, dialect or communication style may also inhibit academic success. In some situations, communication differences may lead to actual or perceived behavior problems. For example, both American Indian and African American educators have reported that the misinterpretation of nonverbal communication style sometimes causes students to be labeled as having behavior problems. Most educators of all races agree that Standard English is needed for success in school and that students may need formal, discrete instruction in language, or clarification as to when standard English (tests and exams) are a necessary component of success.

   Speech/language clinicians or other team members should review the information on linguistic diversity to determine whether verbal and nonverbal communication patterns exhibited by the student are typical of nonstandard English users. Team members may need to accept alternate (dialectic) responses to verbal tasks or to emphasize nonverbal tasks.

C. Socioeconomic Factors

1. **The student is currently homeless or lacks adequate clothing, housing and/or nutrition.**

   When reviewing information and interpreting test results, the team must consider whether the student’s difficulties are attributable to lack of basic necessities. For example, a student who is homeless or living in extremely crowded conditions may not complete homework or may lose textbooks and materials. Lack of adequate housing may also be indicative of other social/emotional, physical health, and nutritional problems. A person who is concerned with basic survival needs may not be able to develop at other levels and may not have the ability or motivation to master academic tasks. The team should also consider whether the student’s lack of basic necessities is a long-term or a short-term situation and if it is an indicator of long-term, generational poverty. There must be clear evidence of the existence of a disability and the need for special education services in order to rule this out as an exclusionary factor.
2. **The student’s parents or caregivers do not have a high school diploma or GED.**

Parents who have not finished high school or obtained a GED are more likely to live in poverty. They also may not be able to provide the types of support for education that is expected by the school, thus minimizing the student’s chances of success in the school environment. They may not have been able to provide assistance with homework or other types of help that the classroom teacher expects. In interpreting the student’s academic performance, team members should consider whether the parent’s limited education has impacted the child.

**D. Resiliency Factors**

Items 1-4 combined: **The student has special strengths, talents, or interests; the student is involved in school and/or community activities; the student has a mentor or a positive adult role model; the family has a support network.**

Items 1-4 pertain to student strengths or resiliency factors. Knowledge of strengths, talents, or the student’s involvement in community activities can be the key in identifying interventions of interest to the student or starting a pattern of success. Likewise, an adult mentor may be the key person in resolving the student’s difficulties in school. The family’s support network can also be involved in helping the school and the child. In assessments, information about these areas of strengths can be compared with performance on assessment instruments to compile a balanced picture of the student’s abilities. Knowledge of special interests can also help examiners establish rapport and enhance assessment performance. Adult mentors may have information to contribute to the assessment process and may even be included in the IEP team with parent consent.

**E. Other Factors**

1. **The student’s family is very mobile (has moved more than once during the current school year or has a pattern of moving at least once a year over several years).**

   Frequent moves may be indicative of a family that is experiencing poverty and stress. Frequent moves also interrupt schooling. The student’s difficulties may be the by-product of an inconsistent education, rather than evidence of a disability. Assessors should look for inconsistent patterns of knowledge and achievement when evaluating students. Family interventions may be needed in order to encourage more stability in the child’s education.

2. **The student’s previous education has been sporadic, limited or very different from the current school.**

   The student’s current difficulties may be the result of lack of exposure or exposure to vastly different curriculum or instructional methods. Diagnostic teaching as well as interviews with parents and the student can help to determine the exact nature of previous education and to identify gaps in instruction. In an assessment, staff should use testing of limits procedures as well as “test/teach/test” processes to better ascertain the student’s ability to learn given consistent instruction. (Also see item 15)
3. The student’s parents or caregivers demonstrate a negative history or attitude toward school.

If parents have had negative experiences during their own schooling, their attitudes may influence their children. Their children may feel that they have no chance of success or that they cannot have positive relationships with teacher or peers. This information should be considered when analyzing classroom performance and interpreting assessment results.

Parents’ past experiences with school may also affect how they interact with special education staff and may even limit the information they provide as part of an assessment. Educators need to make every effort to establish trust and to obtain complete and accurate information from parents.

4. The student’s primary caregiver has changed within the last year.

A change in a student’s family situation will create stress. The team should consider whether this is related to the presenting problems and whether interventions outside of special education (such as counseling) would be appropriate. For actual assessments, the current caretaker may not know the student well enough to provide significant information to the team. Staff may need to gather information from other sources that know the child such as other relatives, older siblings, previous caregivers, etc.

5. The student has recently experienced a crisis or trauma.

Staff should consider whether the crisis or trauma experienced by a student or their family is related to the presenting problem and whether interventions outside of special education would be appropriate. The nature and duration of the crisis and the student’s response should also be considered (is the student experiencing a short-term adjustment or long-term, chronic adjustment problems). The severity of the crisis may also inhibit the student’s performance on special education assessment procedures, limiting the validity of results.

6. The student expresses or displays a sense of stress, anxiety, isolation, or alienation.

The team should consider whether the student’s stress, anxiety, isolation and alienation are related to race and cultural issues, poverty or language differences or by the process of adapting to a new culture. Staff should determine whether these feelings persist across all settings in school or only in certain settings or subjects. It is also important to gather information from the student and the home to determine whether the lack of confidence impacts the student outside of school.