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Guidance for Parents Supporting a Child with Learning Disabilities in the Foreign Service

If your family is with the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Foreign Agricultural Service and the Foreign Commercial Service, or most U.S. government agencies that serve in a mission overseas, the Department of State's medical clearance process in conjunction with the Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR, www.state.gov/m/a/als/1740.htm) will govern the education allowances for your child. If you are employed by a government agency other than the ones listed above, check with your human resources division to find out if your agency also follows the Department of State's medical clearance process.

The Clearance Process

The Office of Medical Services of the Department of State (MED) provides the medical clearance for most personnel and families assigned overseas. This includes review of any special educational needs by the Employee Consultation Service (ECS), an office of Medical Services.

- If your child has never been evaluated, ECS may ask that a diagnostic evaluation be completed. Funding for the evaluation will be provided by ECS.
- If your child is found to have special educational, behavioral, or emotional needs, then the child will be given a Class 2 medical clearance. This means that before an assignment can be finalized, a suitable educational or medical setting must be found for the child with special needs. ECS sometimes works through the regional medical officers (RMO) and/or regional medical officers/psychiatrists (RMO/P) to evaluate specialized programs and facilities overseas. They also consult with the Office of Overseas Schools regarding the adequacy of programs available at the schools at post. Although the Class 2 clearance means that the child is no longer available for worldwide assignment, the intent is to

assure that the child's unique needs and requirements will be met **before** arriving at a new assignment. The Department of State seeks to avoid the situation of a new family arriving at post and finding to their surprise and dismay that no facilities or arrangements are available to meet the child's needs.

- If you are already overseas and you find that your child is having significant educational, emotional or behavioral issues, contact the RMO or the RMO/P and ECS. They may advise you to have the child evaluated at a diagnostic center near you or in the United States. If necessary, the Department will provide funding to obtain this service (DSSR 276.8).
- If your child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), or is found to be eligible for the special needs allowance, MED will issue a cable authorizing the special needs allowance for services defined in the IEP (or its equivalent).

Allowances

All U.S. government agencies (except for the military) follow the Department of State Standardized Regulations for granting the education allowance (DSSR 270) to employees while posted overseas. You may find that these are quite generous or that there will be services not covered that will affect your family's budget. The following allowances apply:

- An employee with a child with a learning disability requiring additional education and related services may be granted an education allowance. For learning disabled children, education allowance is available from birth to the 21st birthday (DSSR 276.21).
- If additional services are needed, in lieu of the school at post rate, you may be reimbursed for allowable education expenses up to the maximum rate, currently \$26,800 for a school at post (DSSR 276.8). The following documentation is required:
 - based on consultation with the agency's medical office, the employee must provide the authorizing official written evidence that the child meets the definition of a disabled child under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 602.3), and
 - there must be a formal IEP or equivalent prepared by a professional medical or educational expert which delineates the educational services required to provide for the child's special needs. For a child under age three, reimbursement will be limited to those services provided for in the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP).
- If required educational services are not available at post, you may choose to send your child to a boarding school. You may be reimbursed up to \$55,350 (DSSR 276.8) for a learning disabled child in boarding school in lieu of the away-from-post allowance.
- If your child needs tutoring to enter or to succeed in the age-appropriate grade a supplemental education allowance of \$3,000 per school year is authorized (DSSR 276.9).
- In exceptional circumstances, when the cost of the services defined in the IEP (or equivalent) exceeds the maximum (\$26,800 at post or \$55,350 away-from-post), the head of the agency can authorize an additional 50% reimbursement for allowable expenses. For agencies using MED, MED has head of agency authority.

The Office of Allowances, the Office of Overseas Schools and/or the Family Liaison Office can assist families to clarify the education allowance. All three offices work with ECS to explore other educational options such as tutoring, homeschooling, and boarding schools for learning disabled students. During the bidding process or once you have been assigned, you may also want to contact the Community Liaison Office coordinator (CLO) at the U.S. embassy or consulate in that city for background information on available schools and on resources in the community. The CLO will be able to tell you which schools and services other American families are using.

Resources within the Department of State and at Overseas Posts

www.state.gov/documents/organization/9960.pdf - Guidelines for Evaluating Children with Learning Disabilities or Developmental Delays

Medics@state.gov - Employee Consultation Service

FloAskEducation@state.gov; www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1958.htm - Family Liaison Office

www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/9856.htm - Special Educational Needs and the Foreign Service Child

www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/19290.htm - Homeschooling the Foreign Service Child

Allowanceso@state.gov; www.state.gov/m/a/als/1740.htm - Office of Allowances

OverseasSchools@state.gov; www.state.gov/m/a/os - Office of Overseas Schools

<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/flo/CLO/clolist.html> - Community Liaison Coordinators at Posts Overseas on the Intranet

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/Policy/IDEA/the_law.html

Resources on Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

www.kidneeds.com/diagnostic_categories/articles/indivfamilyserviceplan.htm

<http://ericec.org/digests/e605.html> - Individual Family Service Plan



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