



# PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | June St. Clair Atkinson, Ed.D., *State Superintendent*

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January 27, 2016

**To:** Directors, Exceptional Children Programs  
Lead Administrators, Charter Schools

**From:** William J. Hussey *WJH*

**Re:** **Feeding Therapy Policy Clarification**

It has come to our attention that there is a misunderstanding surrounding the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) Exceptional Children Division Policy regarding feeding therapy for students with special needs. The purpose of this memo is to correct that misunderstanding.

NCDPI does not have a policy specifically addressing feeding therapy. The *NC Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities* requires that local education agencies consider the unique needs of students with disabilities when developing individualized education programs (IEPs). An IEP Team may consider feeding therapy for a student based on their unique needs. NCDPI does provide guidance, in collaboration with the NC Department of Public Health and the NC Department of Health and Human Services, for school districts with students who have special dietary needs that require accommodations, available at:

<http://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/information-resources/special-diet-food-allergies/modified-diet-workshop/special-diet-needs.pdf>

In the event that a student has unique needs regarding feeding, it is the expectation that the IEP Team convene to develop an appropriate program for the student. On these occasions, the IEP Team may be composed of Speech & Language Therapists; Occupational Therapists, child nutrition workers, nurses, exceptional children teachers and/or exceptional children teacher assistants. These team members may also become the “feeding team” should the student require feeding.

Guidance for feeding is addressed within the document referenced above. NCDPI recognizes that students requiring accommodations/special diets include students with “global developmental delays, behavioral disorders, and complex medical conditions.” [p.24] Furthermore, “children may have a limited ability to chew and swallow. You may have to modify the texture of the food. Students for whom this may be an issue include those with cerebral palsy, cleft lip, cleft palate, Down’s syndrome, and other developmental disabilities.” [p.26]

The reference materials further outline information regarding equipment and training; school-based interventions; techniques to improve sensory awareness; modification of volume and speed of food presentation; food accommodations; and modified food textures. The materials also include the following statement: “In North Carolina, to minimize the chance of misunderstandings, it is recommended that the Child Nutrition program, at a minimum, maintain written instructions or guidance from a licensed physician regarding the texture modifications to be made.”

## EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN DIVISION

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Most importantly, the IEP Team directs the determinations surrounding the individualized needs of each child on a case-by-case basis. If an IEP Team has based a determination regarding feeding therapy on any misunderstanding of the information just described, these determinations will need to be reviewed by a student's IEP Team to ensure that it comports to the information in this memo.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact NCDPI Exceptional Children Division, Policy, Monitoring and Audit Section at 919-807-3969.

WJH/CAH/tb

c: Parent OCR #11-16-1048  
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