

LBL Education Evaluation and Consultation Center
Statement of Professional Practice in Identifying Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)
in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Students

The Evaluation Center believes that the assessment of specific learning disabilities (SLD) should combine both the Response to Intervention (RtI) and Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) models. Well-implemented RtI models can improve early identification of children that struggle to make expected progress in the general curriculum, provide increased instructional opportunities, and reduce the number of students requiring Special Education under SLD. We feel this combined model is especially important when evaluating culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.

Our practices are based on the *Essentials of Cross-Battery Assessment, Third Edition* by Dawn P. Flanagan, Samuel O. Ortiz, and Vincent C. Alfonso. We believe that the identification of SLD requires a comprehensive evaluation that is consistent with its legal (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; IDEA) definition: the identification of a “disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes” that is relevant to an eligibility area of SLD. As part of a PSW model, cognitive assessments are essential to a comprehensive evaluation to identify SLD. Measuring cognitive ability of English Learners can be difficult since English Learners are not adequately represented in any normative sample, whether the test is in English or another language.

During an SLD evaluation, we begin with English language assessments because they can measure a broad range of cognitive areas, do not require a bilingual evaluator, the examiner needs not break standardization protocol, and there is research on how typical English Learners perform on these assessments. There is currently very limited research on how Spanish-speaking English learners perform on Spanish cognitive tests, making interpretation of Spanish tests difficult.

We then use the Cultural-Language Interpretive Matrix (C-LIM) to analyze the data and determine if the student’s knowledge of English and U.S. culture affected the data to the point where the results are not valid. If the scores follow the expected pattern and range for typically developing CLD students on the C-LIM, the student’s cognitive ability is reflective of a typical EL and there is likely no disability.

If the C-LIM indicates that the results can be interpreted, we then re-test the student’s cognitive weaknesses in the student’s native language to confirm the weaknesses. We generally do this through the use of an interpreter, and use these non-standardized results to determine whether the student can perform better in their native language. This is another important step because, if the student is able to perform in the average range in their native language, but not in English, the results of the English testing likely represent their English proficiency rather than a true cognitive weakness. If the student’s scores in their native language are similar to their scores in English, this may reflect a true cognitive weakness, and therefore a disability.

It is the belief of the practitioners at the EECC that in order to conduct responsible cognitive testing with culturally and linguistically diverse students, the C-LIM is a necessary component to differentiate a cultural or linguistic difference from a specific learning disability. This includes students from beginning English learners to those who have been exited from English Language Development services and are considered fluent English speakers.

Our use of the C-LIM is supported by:

- Oregon Department of Education’s [*Special Education Assessment Process for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse \(CLD\) Students, 2015 Update*](#)

For additional information on our evaluation practices, please see our presentation:

- [*Evaluating English Learners for Special Education*](#), 2015 State English Learners Alliance Conference (Claudia Nuñez, Beth Hoecker-Martinez, and Samantha Hirsch)

For additional information on data-based decision making for CLD students, please see our presentation:

- *Child Find and English Learners*, 2014 State English Learners Alliance Conference (Beth Hoecker-Martinez, Leah Hinkle, and Claudia Nuñez)
http://www.cosa.k12.or.us/sites/default/files/materials/events/beth_hoecker-martinez1.pdf
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