



LBL Education Evaluation and Consultation Center Statement of Professional Practice in Identifying Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 amended the SLD eligibility criteria. For the first time in 30 years, states were disallowed from requiring a severe discrepancy between ability and achievement as a criterion for SLD eligibility (34 CFR 300.8(c)(10), and are free to prohibit its use.

This change in legislation reflected a national consensus of opinion advocating the discontinuation of the discrepancy model. Indeed, today's school psychologists complete training programs that no longer teach the discrepancy model.

As of April 2009, the Oregon statement of eligibility for Specific Learning Disability was revised to include a discrepancy model, as well as the previously listed Response to Intervention (RtI) and Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) models. Previous to this date, "discrepancy" was absent from the current SLD eligibility form.

The following organizations have published position statements that support using both RTI and PSW to identify specific learning disabilities, and argue against using a discrepancy model.

- U.S. Dept. of Education: Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), 2007.
<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CQaCorner%2C8%2C>
- National Association of School Psychologists, 2007.
http://www.nasponline.org/about_NASP/positionpapers/StudentsLearningDisabilities.pdf
- Oregon School Psychologists Association, 2009.
<http://www.ospaonline.com/archive/SldToolkit/PSWCondensed41409.doc>
- Oregon Branch of the International Dyslexia Association, 2007.
<http://www.orbida.org/resources/Position%20Paper%20RTI.doc>

Additional references and guidance regarding identification of Specific Learning Disability:

- Suzy Harris, Attorney at Law, Conference of School Administrators Seaside Conference, Special Education Pre-conference Presentation, 2009.
<http://www.cosa.k12.or.us/downloads/profdev/Seaside%202009/PC%20Handouts/Suzy%20Harris/Avoiding%20Pitfalls.pdf>
- Dawn Flanagan, PhD., St. Johns University and Yale Child Center School of Medicine.
<http://www.ospaonline.com/archive/Flanagan10-06.ppt>

The PSW model has a decades-long research base and provides an empirically supported link between specific cognitive abilities and specific areas of academic underachievement. It changes the "unexpected" underachievement of the discrepancy model to "expected" underachievement in the PSW model, based on identified weakness(es) in cognitive processes. And, unlike the discrepancy model, when a student is found eligible as having an SLD using the PSW model, school teams are provided a basis by which to develop, prioritize and deliver instructional interventions that are specifically tailored to that individual student.

The Evaluation Center believes that the evaluation of specific learning disabilities should combine both Response to Intervention (RtI) and Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW). We believe that well-implemented RtI models can improve early identification of children that struggle in the general curriculum, provide increased instructional opportunities and reduce the number of SLD referrals. We further believe that the identification of SLD requires a comprehensive evaluation that is consistent with its 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.