

Principles for the Learning Disability Determination Process

Reasons Not Sufficient to Identify a Learning Disability

There are necessary and sufficient conditions for the identification of a learning disability. Listed below are conditions that may be regarded as necessary, but, in isolation are not sufficient to label a student as a person with a disability.

- Less than average intellectual ability is not sufficient reason or evidence to identify a student as learning disabled.
- Slow rate of learning/progress toward State standards and/or academic achievement below age expectancy is not sufficient evidence for the identification of a student as learning disabled.
- Low academic achievement is not a sufficient reason to identify a student as learning disabled.
- Psychometric documentation of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses is not sufficient evidence to identify a student as learning disabled without comprehensive evidence of the impact of the weaknesses in daily and classroom functioning.

Documentation/Measurement Requirements

No one method of data collection or testing is sufficient basis for the identification of a learning disability. Assessment data must be validated with anecdotal records, history, classroom performance measures, records/documentation of access and response to quality instruction, and psychometric measures of cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

The psychometric methodology for the analysis of cognitive strengths and weaknesses must be implemented using the cognitive and achievement components that were developed, in theory, standardization, and factorial analysis clustering of scores, to be used together. Cross battery analysis, if adopted by a local school district, must adhere to factorial analysis protocols and comply with decision rules recommended within this guidance.

Documentation of appropriate instruction in reading and math and student progress within instruction must be provided for every student. It is expected that every school has procedures in which students are provided with supplemental instruction to remediate performance below age or State standards. In accordance with state and Federal rules, all schools are accountable to make progress toward proficiency on State standards with every student. The school has a fundamental responsibility to provide

quality research based instruction to all students. The Response to Intervention or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support is a data-driven methodology for closing achievement gaps using direct measurement of specific skills before and during research-based supplemental instruction. Whether called “response to intervention” or other intervention process, a quality instructional program applies the principles of instructional intervention/supplement and maintains a system to record/document both the data on student progress and the type, nature, and fidelity of delivery of the supplemental instruction.

Calibration of Identification Decisions Across Wayne County

Within the Federal commentary on Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses, the U.S. Department of Education does not require an assessment of cognitive or intellectual abilities to determine a specific learning disability. The Department allows the “...consideration of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses, or both, relative to intellectual development, if the evaluation group considers that information relevant to an identification of specific learning disability.” The Wayne County Learning Disabilities Committee felt, very strongly, that Response to Intervention, in combination with an analysis of Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses, is very important in differentiating learning disability subtypes, identifying instructional strategies, and in developing a calibration of decisions within and across districts. The committee felt that standardized procedures for understanding the learning abilities of the individual would enhance and inform the identification of learning disability.

Unifying Construct of Learning Skills

As we abandon the severe discrepancy model and embrace new approaches to specific learning disability identification, the committee sought a model of learning ability that would elucidate understanding of the specific learning disability for parents and teachers. Specific learning disabilities do follow a developmental course and there are struggles for the individual student that must be addressed in instruction. One of the biggest challenges to identifying specific learning disability with any consistency is the absence of a unifying construct. Based on extensive review of validity evidence of cognitive and learning constructs, the committee is recommending a robust application of the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) theory. The CHC theory is measurable, norm referenced, validated and there are more than 25 years of educational research on the educational implications of the construct. It is essential for multi-disciplinary teams to learn the same constructs of learning abilities to inform instructional practices. For example, we know the impact of auditory discrimination skills and phonological

awareness on basic reading and this information has informed schools to develop instructional interventions to directly address those deficits. We believe we will build a common understanding of learning abilities that are research-based, valid and measurable by appending the Pattern of Strength and Weakness analysis to the CHC construct of learning.

