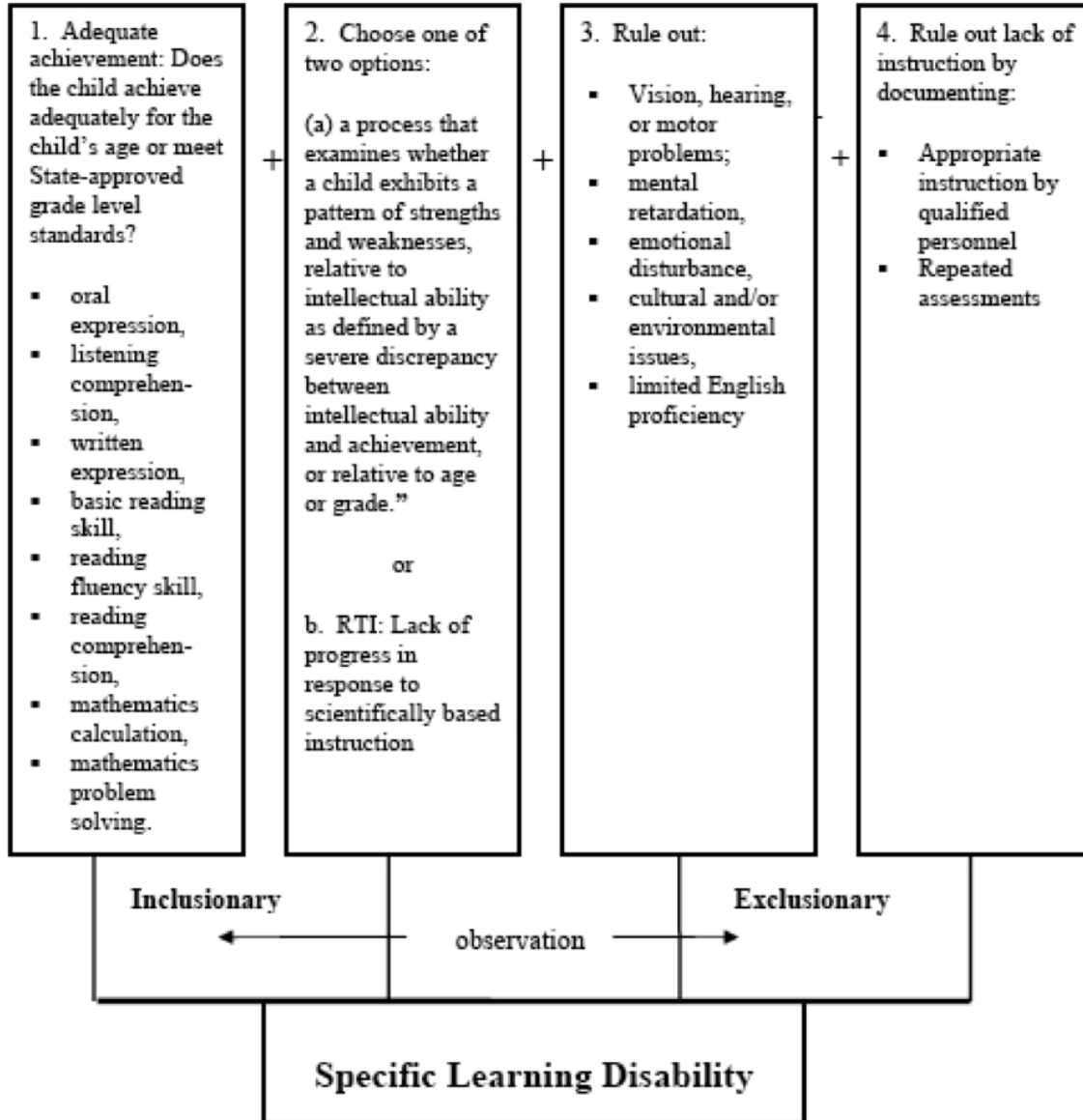# Handout for Professionals:
Special Education Eligibility Criteria for
Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)

The State College Area School District's (SCASD) guidelines for the identification of specific learning disabilities (SLDs) are derived from the Pennsylvania special education regulations (which are drawn from federal special education law, IDEIA).

The team must consider 4 factors when determining whether a child has a specific learning disability:

1. Adequate achievement: Does the child achieve adequately for the child's age or meet State-approved grade level standards?		2. Choose one of two options:		3. Rule out:		4. Rule out lack of instruction by documenting:
- oral expression, - listening comprehension, - written expression, - basic reading skill, - reading fluency skill, - reading comprehension, - mathematics calculation, - mathematics problem solving.	+	(a) a process that examines whether a child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses, relative to intellectual ability as defined by a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement, or relative to age or grade." or b. RTI: Lack of progress in response to scientifically based instruction	+	- Vision, hearing, or motor problems; - mental retardation, - emotional disturbance, - cultural and/or environmental issues, - limited English proficiency	+	- Appropriate instruction by qualified personnel - Repeated assessments

Inclusionary ←——— observation ———→ Exclusionary

Specific Learning Disability

[Figure from *PA Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD),* Pennsylvania Dept. of Education, August 2008]

(1) Adequate Achievement

How is "inadequate" achievement defined?

Inadequate achievement relative to age or grade means that a student's academic achievement in one or more of the 8 SLD areas (listed in box 1 of the figure above) falls **at or below the 10th percentile (or up to the 13th percentile with other supporting data)** compared with a national sample of same-age or same-grade students. [It is up to the Local Education Agency to define inadequate achievement; however, the recommendation of using the 10th percentile comes from PDE's *PA Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities*.]

How is achievement measured?

Information about a student's achievement is gathered through multiple measures, such as individually-administered standardized tests, computer-adaptive assessments (e.g., MAP), curriculum-based assessments, benchmark and progress monitoring assessments, etc.

The criterion of inadequate achievement is the first step in identifying a learning disability, and __MUST__ be met. Even if a student demonstrates a discrepancy in the 2nd criterion, a student does **NOT** meet criteria for SLD unless they are *also* displaying inadequate achievement. For example, some students may have a very high cognitive ability score (IQ), which would predict academic achievement in the above average range. If their obtained achievement was in the Low Average or Average range – lower than predicted – but still above the 10th percentile, they do not meet criteria for SLD.

Example: A student obtains an IQ standard score of 123, and his predicted written expression achievement is a standard score of 116 (86th percentile). His obtained achievement score in testing was a standard score of 96 (40th percentile). Although the score of 96 may be discrepant from what would be predicted given his IQ score, because the score of 96 falls within the Average range and does not represent "inadequate" achievement (i.e., is >10th percentile), criteria for a SLD are not met with regard to this score. (Note: Multiple measures of achievement are made during an evaluation– no decision about eligibility should be made based on a single score).

(2) Choose one of two options:

(a) Discrepancy between ability and achievement, or pattern of strengths and weaknesses

How is an ability-achievement discrepancy determined?

A <u>severe discrepancy</u> between ability and achievement means that the student displays a significant and rare (occurring in $\leq$ 10-15% of the test sample) difference between their obtained academic achievement scores and the achievement scores that would be predicted given their measured cognitive ability (e.g., Full Scale IQ score).

Another method is looking at a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in the student's achievement. If a student has a composite score on a standardized achievement measure that is <u>significantly lower</u> than a composite score in another area of achievement

(reading, writing, or math), then the student <u>may</u> possibly have an SLD in the area of achievement that is significantly lower.

"Significantly lower" = non-overlapping 90% confidence intervals between the two composite scores being compared. A "weakness" may be demonstrated when the upper limit of one score's confidence interval (range in which the 'true' score is expected to fall 9 times out of 10) is lower than the lower limit of the second score's confidence interval.
Example: A reading composite score 90% confidence interval of 70-78 standard score is a weakness relative to a math composite score confidence interval of 90-99).

OR

> ### (b) Lack of response to instruction and intervention (RtII)

The RtII method of determining SLD is currently approved (by the PA Dept. of Education) to be used ONLY in the areas of Basic Reading Skill and Reading Fluency Skill in grades K-3 in our district. (For all other areas of SLD and for basic reading and reading fluency skill above 3rd grade, the ability-achievement discrepancy method described above is used.)

What is Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII)?
RtII is a service delivery model based on intervening early and providing tiers of increasingly intensive scientifically-based (i.e., research-based) instruction and intervention.
Tier 1 = This represents the core curriculum provided to ALL students, and all students in K-3 are assessed to see if they are meeting early literacy or reading benchmarks 3 times per year.
Tier 2 = For those students who do not meet grade-level benchmarks, supplemental instruction is provided (20-60) minutes daily in a small-group setting (e.g., Title I) in addition to the core curriculum in Tier 1. Students' progress in Tier 2 is measured bi-weekly.
Tier 3 = For those students who do not show sufficient progress toward attaining grade-level benchmarks when provided with Tier 2 instruction and intervention, more intensive intervention is provided in a smaller-group setting (e.g., 1 teacher for up to 3 students) or one-on-one (for a total of 60-75 minutes [Kindergarten could be total of 45-75 minutes] daily beyond the core curriculum). Students' progress in Tier 3 is measured weekly.

How is "Lack of Response" to instruction and intervention determined?
A student's progress on a curriculum-based measure of academic skill (e.g., oral reading fluency) is measured through repeated assessments over time.

When a student has been provided with the most intensive level of scientifically-based instruction (i.e., in Tier 3) for a minimum of 10-12 weeks
AND
his/her achievement remains significantly below age- or grade-level benchmarks (discrepant level*)
AND

his/her rate of improvement on the measured academic skill (e.g., oral reading fluency) is less than or equal to the expected rate of improvement for that skill (discrepant rate**), such that the student is not "closing the gap" between his/her performance and benchmark expectations,

THEN

the student may be said to be demonstrating a "lack of progress" and criteria for an SLD may be met.

Discrepant level: $\leq$ 10th percentile up to 13th percentile (i.e., lowest 10-13%) compared to same-grade students
**Discrepant rate*: Student's actual rate of improvement (ROI) is 125% or less of expected rate of improvement (based on average rate of improvement of a national sample of students in the same grade)

Example: The current 10th percentile of oral reading fluency (based on a national normative sample) in the spring of second grade is 59 words correct per minute. A child reading consistently at or below this level would be said to have a "discrepant level." If the expected rate of improvement (based on national norms) was an increase of 1.0 words correct per minute (wcpm) each week, a student with an average rate of improvement of 1.25 wcpm (125% of expected ROI) or less would be said to have a "discrepant rate," because the achievement "gap" is not closing sufficiently despite intensive, research-based instruction.

Note: If a student's actual rate of improvement is 126-150% of the expected rate of improvement, and the level is less than or equal to 10th up to 13th percentile, consider what percentage of the student's target ROI they are obtaining – 50% or less of target ROI (ROI needed to meet end-of-year benchmark based on student's current level of performance) may still meet criteria for SLD (with other supporting evidence from multiple measures)

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(3) Rule out other possible contributing physical, cognitive, or emotional/behavioral factors that could better explain the child's inadequate academic achievement

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• Information is collected to provide evidence that the student's academic difficulties are *not* primarily a result of these factors
• Information gathered may include (but is not limited to): results of school vision and hearing screenings, medical information about child's physical condition, social/emotional and/or adaptive behavior ratings, observations, etc.

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(4) Rule out lack of instruction as an explanation for the child's inadequate achievement.

• Demonstrate that the child received appropriate instruction from highly qualified personnel, and
• Document that repeated assessments of the child's academic skills were given over time (e.g., curriculum-based measurement, running records, district assessments, unit tests, etc.)

QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about the information included in this handout, please contact the school psychologist at your school. If you do not know who the school psychologist is at your school, call your school's main office or the Special Education office at 231-1072.

(Last modified 1/4/17)

COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS

If you would like to make suggestions for ways to improve this handout, please contact Sarah Rochette at ser20@scasd.org. Thank you for your input!

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