

MASP Position Statement on the Role of School Psychologists in the Identification of Specific Learning Disabilities.

Changes in federal special education law (IDEA 2004) and subsequent implementation regulations have allowed schools to operationalize the determination that a student has a specific learning disability (SLD) by using one of three different methods: (1.) A student may be considered eligible if there is a failure to respond to scientifically validated interventions, (2.) A student may also be found eligible if there is a pattern of strengths and weakness that are determined by the evaluation team to be important in the identification of SLD, or (3.) An additional option lists the possibility that another model could be chosen if it was scientifically validated.

Both IDEA 2004 and its regulations clearly require a comprehensive evaluation to occur before eligibility is determined. Within the scope of that evaluation is the need to consider a student's functioning within a variety of domains (cognitive, academic, social and behavioral) as well as to examine exclusionary criteria to rule out the possibility of another disability and to consider the effects of culture, socioeconomic status and previous educational experience. Within the scope of an evaluation or reevaluation for a specific learning disability, this can include screening and evaluation for social or emotional difficulties, behavioral concerns, autism, or cognitive impairment. More than ever, the federal rules regarding eligibility place a great demand on individual teams to make defensible decisions. As a result, there is a greater need than ever for individual team members to be familiar with the variety of technical and legal requirements for making a determination of SLD.

School psychologists have the assessment and measurement skills to gather relevant information regarding referral questions. This includes reviewing records; interviewing teachers, parents and students; making direct classroom observations; and using standardized testing procedures. School psychologists also have the experience with data-based decision making to evaluate and interpret the instructional implication of assessment results and to recommend, based on all the information obtained, whether a student is a student with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). The expertise of school psychologists in the areas of measurement and evaluation as well as intervention design is critical to reducing errors in decision-making for student eligibility, regardless of the model that is being used. For these reasons, the Michigan Association of School Psychologists asserts that the inclusion of school psychologists as multidisciplinary team members is a necessary component of providing a comprehensive evaluation for SLD.

(Approved by MASP Board of Directors November 30, 2009)