A grayscale photograph of a desk with various school supplies. In the foreground, there is a stack of papers and a spiral notebook. A ruler is placed across the papers. To the left, there is a box containing pens and pencils. In the background, there is a box of markers and a small container. The desk is set against a dark blue background.

**2010**  
**GUIDELINES for IDENTIFYING**  
**CHILDREN with**  
**LEARNING DISABILITIES**

*September 2010*

Connecticut State  
Department of Education

**CONNECTICUT STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Mark K. McQuillan  
Commissioner

George A. Coleman  
Deputy Commissioner

**Division of Family & Student Support Services**

Charlene Russell-Tucker  
Associate Commissioner

**Bureau of Special Education**

Anne Louise Thompson  
Bureau Chief

Patricia L. Anderson, Project Manager, Education Consultant  
Perri S. Murdica, Project Manager, Education Consultant

**Office of Planning, Media and Constituent Services**

Matthew J. Falconer, Editor, Page Layout

**2010**

**GUIDELINES for IDENTIFYING**

**CHILDREN with**

**LEARNING DISABILITIES**

*September 2010*

Connecticut State  
Department of Education

---

**Foreword** . . . . . **v**

**Preface** . . . . . **vi**

Navigation toolbar legend . . . . . vi

**Acknowledgments** . . . . . **viii**

Learning Disabilities Guidelines Advisory Task Force . . . . . viii

**1 | Introduction** . . . . . **1**

Historical Background: Debates about Identification and Changes in Federal Legislation . . . . . 1  
     Debates surrounding the IQ-achievement discrepancy requirement . . . . . 1  
     Debates surrounding the use of processing measures . . . . . 2  
     Debates surrounding general education practices . . . . . 3  
     Students with learning disabilities in Connecticut . . . . . 4  
     Important federal legislation . . . . . 5  
 Definition of a Specific Learning Disability . . . . . 5  
 Purpose of this Revision . . . . . 5

**2 | Increasing Capacity** . . . . . **7**

Unification of General Education and Special Education . . . . . 7  
     State and federal policy toward a unified system . . . . . 7  
 Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions to Increase Capacity . . . . . 8  
     Roles of general educators and specialists . . . . . 8  
 Identifying & Implementing Scientific Research-Based & Evidence-Based Practices . . . . . 10  
 Families as Partners . . . . . 12  
 Increasing Capacity in Key Academic Domains . . . . . 12  
     Reading . . . . . 13  
     Written Expression . . . . . 15  
     Mathematics . . . . . 17  
 From the Elementary Level to the Secondary Level . . . . . 19  
 School Climate, Social-Emotional Learning and Classroom Management . . . . . 21  
 Intervention and Teacher Assistance Teams . . . . . 22  
 When is Referral to Special Education Appropriate? . . . . . 22

**3 | Identification of a Specific Learning Disability and Determining Eligibility for Special Education** . . . . . **24**

Determining the Need for a Comprehensive Evaluation . . . . . 24  
 The Role and Rights of Families in the Special Education Evaluation Process . . . . . 25  
 Design of a Comprehensive Evaluation . . . . . 26  
 Federal Requirements for Eligibility . . . . . 28

Federal Rationale for Changing Criteria for Determination of a Specific Learning Disability 29  
 Connecticut Criteria for Determining if a Student Has a Specific Learning Disability and Is  
 Eligible for Special Education . . . . . 30  
 Brief Comparison of 1999 Criteria and 2009 Criteria . . . . . 30  
 Further Information on Determining Inadequate Response to Intervention Through SRBI 31  
 A Note About Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses . . . . . 35  
 Required Documentation: Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report and Worksheets . . . . . 36  
     Description of forms . . . . . 36  
     Instructions for completing forms . . . . . 36

**4 | Planning a Comprehensive Evaluation . . . . . 39**

Nonbiased Assessment . . . . . 39  
 Language Status . . . . . 40  
 Behavior and Social-Emotional Functioning . . . . . 40  
 Data to Document Appropriate Instruction . . . . . 41  
     Important features of appropriate progress-monitoring measures . . . . . 41  
     Responsibilities of the PPT . . . . . 43  
 Using Appropriate Types of Test Scores . . . . . 44  
     The role of diagnostic assessment . . . . . 44  
 The Option to Administer IQ Tests . . . . . 45  
 The Option to Administer Processing Measures . . . . . 45

**5 | Other Considerations in Determining Eligibility . . . . . 46**

Influences of Culture, Race and Languages other than English . . . . . 46  
 Behavioral and Social-Emotional Influences . . . . . 47  
 Influence of Economic or Environmental Disadvantage . . . . . 47  
 Other Disabilities . . . . . 48  
 Adequacy of Assessments . . . . . 48  
 Adequacy of Interventions and Fidelity of Implementation . . . . . 49  
 Considerations in Specific Academic Domains . . . . . 50  
     Reading . . . . . 50  
     Written expression . . . . . 53  
     Mathematics . . . . . 55  
 The Need for Special Education . . . . . 57  
 Independent Educational Evaluations for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities . . . . . 57

**6 | Special Considerations . . . . . 58**

Preschool-Age Children . . . . . 58  
 Students with High Ability (Intellectual Giftedness) . . . . . 60  
 Grade Retention and Late School Entrance . . . . . 61  
 Reevaluation and Determination of Continued Eligibility . . . . . 61

<b>7   Issues in Identification at the Middle and High School Levels . . . . .</b>	<b>64</b>
Emergence of Specific Learning Disabilities at the Elementary vs. Secondary Level . . . . .	64
Identification Issues at the Secondary Level . . . . .	64
Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment . . . . .	65
<b>8   Recommended Practices for Consistent Identification . . . . .</b>	<b>68</b>
Self-Evaluation of Capacity . . . . .	68
District Analysis of Available Data . . . . .	68
Uniform Professional Development Opportunities . . . . .	69
Case Reviews and Clinical Conferencing . . . . .	69
Core Assessments . . . . .	69
Core Diagnostic Team . . . . .	69
<b>References . . . . .</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Appendix A: Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report Form . . . . .</b>	<b>81</b>
Portrait . . . . .	82
Landscape . . . . .	85
<b>Appendix B: Worksheets to Document Appropriate Instruction in Reading, Mathematics, and/or Written Expression . . . . .</b>	<b>87</b>
Reading Worksheet – ED 630 . . . . .	88
Mathematics Worksheet – ED 631 . . . . .	90
Written Expression Worksheet – ED 636 . . . . .	92
<b>Appendix C: Written Mutual Agreement Form (ED 637) . . . . .</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Appendix D: Policies Involving English Language Learners . . . . .</b>	<b>96</b>
Connecticut Position Statement on the Education of Students Acquiring English as a Second Language Adopted January 3, 2001 . . . . .	96
<b>Appendix E: Instructional Models for English Language Learners (ELLs) . . . . .</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Glossary . . . . .</b>	<b>101</b>

# Foreword



**Mark K.  
McQuillan**  
Commissioner  
of Education

**S**tate legislation and policies in Connecticut have consistently sought to improve the quality of education for all students, particularly those identified with disabilities. The Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE) and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) work collaboratively to ensure that public schools are implementing best practices that result in a positive education experience for all of Connecticut's students. In 2008, the CSDE deepened this commitment through the dissemination of a Connecticut framework for response to intervention, *Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for All Students*.

The *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* (2010) and its alignment with the Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) framework emphasize the necessity of effective collaboration between general and special education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) enabled states to adopt new eligibility criteria for students with a specific learning disability, to include identification procedures that are more accurate and consistent with current scientific evidence. This change in practice is intended to improve the appropriate identification of students with a specific learning disability by assessing students in ways that are more relevant to improving instruction and encouraging more efficient use of data.

This full guidelines document provides detailed discussions of the eligibility criteria outlined in the 2009 Executive Summary, as well as much greater elaboration of the rationale for the revised criteria, relevant research findings and key issues in the implementation of the guidelines. The document offers suggestions for increasing the capacity of general education and special education to meet the instructional needs of students with specific learning disabilities; details regarding developing a comprehensive evaluation; special situations, such as those involving very young children or students with intellectual giftedness; and issues in providing services for middle and high school students. Required forms, as well as a reference section and a glossary of important terms, may be found at the end of this document.

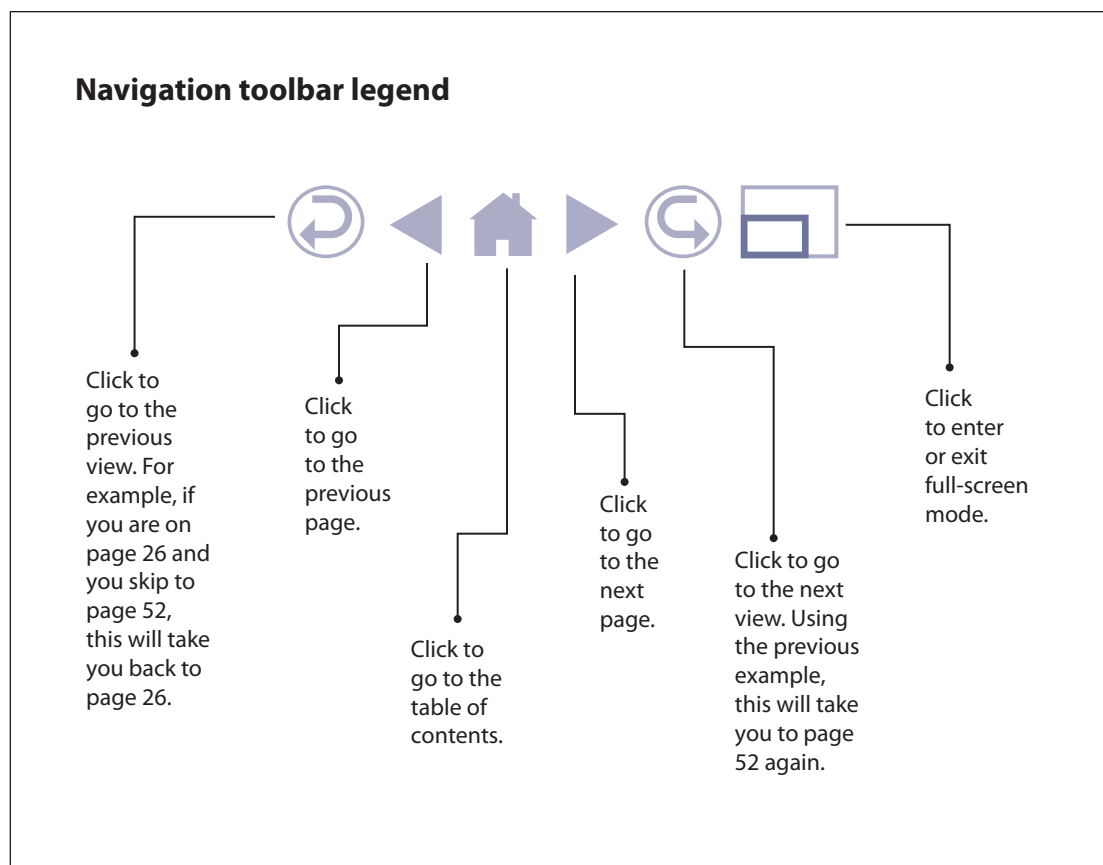
The Connecticut State Department of Education offers this 2010 revision of the *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* to assist school districts in identifying students with a specific learning disability under the provisions of IDEA 2004. In addition, these revised guidelines are intended to promote identification procedures that are nonbiased, nondiscriminatory, educationally useful and uniform across school districts. It is expected that districts' careful implementation of these guidelines will improve early intervention and identification practices while bolstering educational attainment for all students.

*Mark K. McQuillan*

# Preface

The 2010 *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* provides a comprehensive description of the changes in IDEA 2004 regarding the identification and eligibility determination of children with a specific learning disability. Extensive information to assist general and special education personnel to increase their capacity to use scientific research-based instruction, interventions and assessment to meet the needs of all students is elaborated upon in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics. While the 2010 guidelines provide specific criteria for identifying a student with a specific learning disability as well as guidance about planning a comprehensive evaluation, this document is not intended to be prescriptive. It is recommended that planning and placement teams and other school personnel use these guidelines to develop processes and procedures that ensure: a student's learning difficulties are not due to a lack of appropriate instruction; extensive formal and informal data are collected to ensure that appropriate identification of students with a specific learning disability occur consistently across all grade levels; and a student's individualized education program is developed in a way that improves learning.

Appendices of required forms, references and a glossary of terms will guide the reader through this document. **Many parts of the document are interactive.** Hyperlinks to relevant resources and sections can be found in the right margins and periodically throughout the text. Use the toolbar in the top right corner of each page to navigate the document, and activate full-screen mode for optimal viewing (see legend below). Alternatively, the bookmarks panel of the Adobe Acrobat Reader window can be used to quickly navigate to any section of the document.





The *2010 Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* is intended to provide guidance for school teams to make appropriate decisions of eligibility for Connecticut students. As additional resources and tools are developed regarding the identification and instruction of students with learning disabilities, they will be posted on the Bureau of Special Education's Web site.

We welcome your comments about the guidelines, specifically on the following topics:

- sections of the guidelines that may need further clarification;
- explanation of any special circumstances in the identification and eligibility process for students with learning disabilities that may not be included in the revised guidelines;
- impact of the new guidelines on eligibility procedures in your district;
- professional development that has been helpful to your district in making appropriate eligibility decisions; and
- professional development that may be necessary because of the changes in eligibility decisions.

Please send comments and suggestions to Dr. Patricia Anderson at [patricia.anderson@ct.gov](mailto:patricia.anderson@ct.gov) or Perri Murdica at [perri.murdica@ct.gov](mailto:perri.murdica@ct.gov). For technical questions about this document, please e-mail Matthew Falconer in the Office of Planning, Media and Constituent Services at [matthew.falconer@ct.gov](mailto:matthew.falconer@ct.gov).

# Acknowledgments

Special thanks for the guidance provided in the development of these guidelines are extended to:

Louise Spear-Swerling  
Professor/Special Education  
Southern Connecticut State University

## Project Managers

Patricia L. Anderson  
Education Consultant  
State Department of Education  
Bureau of Special Education

Perri S. Murdica  
Education Consultant  
State Department of Education  
Bureau of Special Education

## **Learning Disabilities Guidelines Advisory Task Force**

Karen Aduskevich  
Math Specialist/Supervisor  
Southington School District

Kate England  
Principal  
Nathan Hale Elementary School  
Manchester School District

Nancy Prescott  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Parent Advocacy  
Center

Michelle Baker  
Special Education Supervisor  
West Side Middle School  
Waterbury School District

Michael Faggella-Luby  
Assistant Professor  
UConn/Special Education

Mike Regan  
Pupil Services Director  
Newtown School District

Ron Benner  
School Psychologist  
Bridgeport School District

Margie Gillis  
Researcher/Project Director  
Haskins Laboratory

Ann Terezakis  
Education Consultant  
Klebanoff & Alfano, P.C.

Sara Bowman  
Leader in Residence  
State Department of Education  
Bureau of School and District  
Improvement

Joan Hofmann  
Associate Professor  
Saint Joseph College

Richard Thomas  
Retired Special Education Director  
for Department of Corrections  
State Advisory Council

Sandra Chafouleas  
Associate Professor  
UConn/School Psychology

Jocelyn Mackey  
Education Consultant  
State Department of Education  
Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family

Jule McCombes-Tolis  
Professor  
Southern Connecticut State  
University/Special Education

Starr Champion  
Consultant  
Connecticut Parent Advocacy  
Center

Joseph Madaus  
Associate Professor  
UConn/Storrs  
Services and Adult Education

Antoinette Towle  
Director  
Polaris Center  
Special Education  
Capitol Region Education Center

Eric Colon  
Bilingual School Psychologist  
New Britain School District

Donna Merritt  
Consultant  
State Education Resource Center

Joanne White  
Education Consultant,  
Language Arts  
State Department of Education  
Bureau of Curriculum  
and Instruction

Joy DiMaggio  
Guidance Director  
Enfield School District

Clint Montgomery  
Superintendent  
Regional School District 7

# I | Introduction

## **Historical Background: Debates about Identification and Changes in Federal Legislation**

**T**he Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142, was a groundbreaking federal law that required public school districts to locate, identify and evaluate students with disabilities and to provide a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment to students who were eligible for special education. Learning disabilities is a disability category under which students could be eligible for special education services. PL 94-142 conceptualized individuals with learning disabilities as having a discrepancy between their broad ability to learn and their actual achievement in core academic or linguistic areas. Many state educational guidelines, including the previous *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999), operationalized this concept as a discrepancy between a student's intelligence quotient (IQ) score, employed as the measure of broad learning ability, and her or his achievement when expressed as a standard score. To meet eligibility criteria for learning disabilities, a student's IQ score had to be significantly higher than her or his achievement standard score in the domain of difficulty, for example, in basic reading or math calculation. PL 94-142 also conceptualized learning disabilities as involving a disorder in a "basic psychological process," a concept operationalized as a requirement for a processing disorder in the 1999 state guidelines as well as in those of other states. In the decades since the passage of PL 94-142, the existence of learning disabilities has been widely accepted in both the scientific and educational communities. However, identification practices for learning disabilities have remained highly controversial.

**Debates surrounding the IQ-achievement discrepancy requirement.** Considerable debate exists regarding the reliability and validity in decision making when relying on an IQ-achievement discrepancy model for the identification of learning disabilities. Several evolutions of policy have attempted to correct for these kinds of issues. For example, the 1999 state guidelines focused more attention on the need for technically adequate tests, as well as on understanding the effects of standard error of measurement and regression to the mean when calculating IQ-achievement discrepancies. Furthermore, state eligibility criteria in the 1999 state guidelines required the use of regression tables in determining these discrepancies in order to correct for the effects of regression to the mean. Correction for regression was important in the context of a federal requirement for an ability-achievement discrepancy but unfortunately could not solve other core problems associated with the use of the discrepancy requirement.

Reliance on an IQ-achievement discrepancy as a diagnostic component makes identification of learning disabilities particularly problematic in the early grades because it often takes time for students to accumulate a sufficiently large discrepancy to be eligible for services. Hence, discrepancy criteria have often resulted in and been criticized as a "wait to fail" model (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, and Barnes, 2007). Other problems also were associated with the use of IQ tests, such as concerns about the validity of IQ measures in populations that are culturally and linguistically diverse (Gunderson and Siegel, 2001). Moreover, IQ and achievement tests do not tap completely independent abilities, but rather interact in some important ways. For example, verbal abilities such as vocabulary are acquired in part through reading, and poor readers typically have much less experience reading than do good readers; therefore, a longstanding reading problem could

ultimately lead to a decline in a student's IQ score (Stanovich, 2000).

Another critical problem with the IQ-achievement discrepancy is that research does not support excluding students from services based on their failure to meet IQ-achievement discrepancy criteria. Struggling readers with an IQ-achievement discrepancy and those without a discrepancy tend to have similar remedial needs and benefit from similar types of interventions (Gunderson and Siegel, 2001), yet nondiscrepant low achievers may be erroneously viewed as intellectually limited and incapable of improvement. The IQ-achievement discrepancy also appears to contribute to biased identification practices. For example, several studies have found that the use of a discrepancy model in reading favored identification of Caucasian students and middle- and upper-income students; whereas students of color and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to be identified as having an intellectual disability (Fletcher et al., 2007; Speece, Case, and Molloy, 2003). Since students from nonmainstream cultural groups often possess cognitive styles that differ from those typically promoted by the schools, the inappropriate use of standardized tests that are not normed or validated for a specific population often perpetuates cultural misunderstandings, which in turn contributes to poor instructional decision-making (McIntyre, 1996). Aaron, Joshi, Gooden and Bentum (2008) and Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, and Bos (2002) argued that testing for an IQ-achievement discrepancy often does not provide instructionally useful information and may contribute to inadequate remedial efforts.

Although much of the research on problems with the IQ-achievement discrepancy is in the domain of reading, most of the previously mentioned problems clearly apply to other domains as well, such as mathematics and written expression. The IQ-achievement discrepancy has the same “wait to fail” limitations in mathematics and written expression as it has in reading and does not help educators plan effective interventions across a variety of academic domains. Considered as a whole, the findings described above undermine an educational distinction based on an IQ-achievement discrepancy model.

It should be noted that, although the use of an IQ-achievement discrepancy in identification of learning disabilities is problematic in numerous ways, disagreement exists on whether IQ tests provide information essential to assessment and intervention planning for students with learning disabilities. In a review of several meta-analyses on this issue, Swanson (2009) argues that IQ, especially verbal IQ, provides information useful both in identification of learning disabilities and in understanding treatment outcomes. In contrast, in their review of the literature, Fletcher et al. (2007) conclude that IQ tests do not generally provide educationally useful information beyond that obtainable from other measures typically given in a comprehensive evaluation, such as measures of academic functioning and language.

**Debates surrounding the use of processing measures.** Determining the presence of a specific processing disorder has historically been problematic for professionals in the field and continues to be an area ripe for debate. One particular area of difficulty involves the technical adequacy, especially validity, of some processing measures, which often leads to misinterpretation and overgeneralization of findings. Although there are technically adequate tests in some areas, such as phonological processing measures for students with reading difficulties, other processing measures used in identification of learning disabilities remain problematic (Fletcher et al., 2007; Salvia and Ysseldyke, 2004). For example, scientific research on visual processing typically employs stimuli presented briefly, using a computer, because it is important to measure pure visual processing independent of linguistic or motor processes. However, visual processing measures employed in educational testing frequently involve relatively long presentation times as well as paper-and-pencil tasks. If a student does poorly on these kinds of measures, it is difficult to ascertain whether the problem is due to difficulties with visual processing, language processing, motor skill, or some combination of these factors. In addition, there is little evidence that matching interventions to students based on their processing profiles, such as whether they are “visual

learners” or “auditory learners,” is effective (Fletcher, Morris, and Lyon, 2003). The choice of assessment instruments, as well as having a thorough understanding of the technical characteristics of any measurement tool, remains the professional responsibility of the evaluator.

Even when appropriate processing measures are used, the information obtained may not necessarily add educational value over and above information that is already available from achievement and language measures (Fletcher et al., 2007). Low scores on processing tests, by themselves, do not necessarily indicate the presence of a genuine “disorder” because experience and instruction can influence a student’s performance on processing measures. For example, a student who obtains a low score on a test of phonological awareness might appear to have an intrinsic processing disorder, but also may have performed poorly due to insufficient experiences with the phonological aspect of language, insufficient instruction in phonological awareness or a weak understanding of the metalinguistic demands of the task itself. Thus, the indiscriminate use of measures to document a processing disorder can consume considerable time and resources, potentially delaying services, and leaving less time and fewer resources to meet students’ instructional needs.

Conversely, a substantial link for a causal relationship between cognitively based information processing and learning disabilities has been described in the literature over the past decade, particularly in area of reading achievement (Floyd, Keith, Taub and McGrew, 2007; Hulme, Snowling, Caravolas and Carroll, 2005; Meltzer and Krishnan, 2007; Torgesen, 2002). The use of appropriate, technically adequate processing measures may provide additional insight into the individual cognitive underpinnings of a student’s suspected learning disability and may contribute to identifying alternative interventions and instructional strategies that need to be developed for specialized instruction to occur. As Kavale and Spaulding (2008) indicate, a comprehensive evaluation, especially one including cognitive processing assessment, connects the identification of a specific learning disability (SLD) with a clearly articulated IDEA definitional component: “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written” (34 Code of Federal Regulations Section 300.8[c][10]). Furthermore, in a meta-analysis of 32 studies regarding the evaluation of cognitive processes to inform the identification of a specific learning disability, Johnson, Humphrey, Mellard, Woods and Swanson (2010) found differences of sufficient magnitude between groups of students with SLD and typically achieving students to justify including appropriate, technically adequate measures of cognitive processing ability in a comprehensive evaluation of students suspected of having a specific learning disability. They suggest that some students, despite being of average ability, may fail to achieve even when provided with high-quality instruction because of underlying specific cognitive processing deficits. Therefore, student performance on appropriate kinds of processing measures may certainly be taken into account in the identification of learning disabilities in cases where the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) believes such information, especially as it relates to the suspected area of disability, may be helpful as part of a comprehensive evaluation in developing more targeted instruction. (*The PPT is the Connecticut equivalent of the individualized education program [IEP] team described in IDEA.*)

**Debates surrounding general education practices.** Many investigators (e.g., Allington and McGill-Franzen, in press; Moats, 1999; Spear-Swerling, 2004a) have raised concerns about the role of inadequate general education practices in students’ learning problems. These investigators suggest that some students classified as having learning disabilities are actually curriculum casualties whose difficulties stem mainly from ineffective general education practices rather than true disabilities in learning. Furthermore, research suggests that contextual factors heavily influence individual teachers’ willingness to refer students for evaluations for possible learning disabilities. For example, although serious reading difficulties are roughly as common in girls as in boys, teachers are more likely to refer boys to special education, because they are more likely

to perceive boys as behavior problems (Shaywitz, 2003). The influence of contextual factors is further illustrated by Drame (2002) who gave teachers descriptions of students with academic and behavioral difficulties and asked teachers to make recommendations regarding evaluation referrals for learning disabilities. Teachers at schools with well-defined early intervention services and teachers who used a combination of grouping practices were less likely to recommend referral than were teachers who lacked access to well-defined early intervention or those who relied heavily on whole-class groups for teaching reading.

It is well documented that effective general education practices make a difference in student achievement (Juel and Minden-Cupp, 2000; Marzano, Pickering and Pollack, 2001; National Reading Panel, 2000; Reeves, 2002). Well-designed, research-based interventions can improve outcomes greatly for most low achievers (Al Otaiba, 2001; Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, and Francis, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs and Hollenbeck, 2007; Vellutino and Scanlon, 2002). The 1999 state guidelines recognized the importance of ensuring that students considered for evaluations for possible learning disabilities had adequate instruction and opportunities to learn. These guidelines addressed this issue through a requirement for documentation of early intervening services in the student's area of difficulty (e.g., basic reading, reading comprehension, math calculation, math reasoning). Requirements for early intervening services were extensive and rigorous relative to those of other states at the time. For instance, prior to considering students with decoding difficulties for evaluation for possible learning disabilities, requirements included providing explicit small-group interventions in phonemic awareness, multisensory code-based instruction, synthetic phonics instruction, analytic phonics instruction, and daily fluency practice. For students with math difficulties, requirements for early intervening services included providing opportunities for guided and independent practice, instruction using manipulatives, and individual or small group direct instruction to re-teach weak skills. These early intervening service requirements were progressive for their time. They also addressed requirements in IDEA 1997 to rule out inappropriate instruction prior to identifying students with disabilities. Unfortunately, however, while early intervening services are vital, they do not address potential problems in core general education practices, such as the use of an inadequate curriculum, ineffective instructional strategies, or inconsistencies in practices across teachers or grades.

**Students with learning disabilities in Connecticut.** In the 2007-08 school year, the most recent year for which data are available, the Connecticut State Department of Education's Bureau of Data Collection, Research and Evaluation reported that 22,312 Connecticut public school students were identified with a specific learning disability, accounting for 4 percent of all public school students in the state. As compared to the previous three years, the number of students with a specific learning disability as a percentage of the total public school population declined by 9.2 percent. However, of all students with disabilities, students with a specific learning disability remain the largest single category of students in special education in Connecticut, representing 34.6 percent of all students with disabilities in the 2007-08 school year. By comparison, 4.2 percent of the special education population were students with intellectual disability, 9.1 percent were those with emotional disturbance, and 6.3 percent were those with autism.

While the total number of students identified with a specific learning disability has decreased, the diversity of this student subgroup has increased. Approximately 40 percent of students identified with a specific learning disability were African-American or Hispanic, an increase of 2 percentage points from previous years. Furthermore, by the 2007-08 school year, 7 percent of students with a specific learning disability were also English language learners. Almost 40 percent of students with a specific learning disability were also eligible for either free or reduced-price meals. Of students with a specific learning disability, 99 percent took standardized assessments such as the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) and achieved proficiency at levels commensurate with or better than the total special education

population but significantly below the level of the general education population.

**Important federal legislation.** In the 10 years since the 1999 Connecticut *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities*, the federal government has passed two important pieces of legislation relevant to students with disabilities: the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, IDEA 2004. Improved outcomes for *all* students, including those with disabilities, are the keystone of NCLB. IDEA 2004 upholds this expectation for students with disabilities by embracing the specific language used in NCLB regarding the necessity for highly qualified personnel, the delivery of “scientifically based academic and behavioral interventions, including scientifically based literacy instruction,” (34 CFR § 300.226[b][1]) and student assessment. NCLB identifies the essential components of reading instruction as “explicit and systematic instruction in: phonemic awareness; phonics; vocabulary development; reading fluency, including oral reading skills; and reading comprehension strategies.” (20 USC 6368 § 1208[c]) Furthermore, IDEA 2004 introduced major changes to the ways in which school districts can identify students with specific learning disabilities. These changes were in response to problems with existing identification criteria noted in the beginning of this document, as well as to other evidence that suggested effective ways to identify and teach students with learning disabilities (Fletcher et al., 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000; President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002).

## Definition of a Specific Learning Disability

IDEA 2004 defines a specific learning disability (SLD) as:

*A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (34 CFR § 300.8(c)(10))*

This definition is unchanged from those found in previous versions of federal law, such as IDEA 1997, and unchanged from the definition in the 1999 state guidelines.

## Purpose of this Revision

This 2010 revision of the *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999) has five primary goals:

- to ensure Connecticut’s compliance with the IDEA 2004 requirements for the identification of students with learning disabilities;
- to align Connecticut’s guidelines for the identification of students with learning disabilities with current scientific evidence-based research;
- to promote the implementation of statewide uniform and valid identification processes and procedures that are culturally relevant, nonbiased and nondiscriminatory both within and across school districts in Connecticut;

- to use information obtained through the identification process to develop and implement an individually designed education program with appropriate services and support to achieve educational benefit, as evidenced by data demonstrating student growth; and
- to improve outcomes for students with learning disabilities through more accurate identification procedures using technically adequate and educationally relevant measures.



## 2 | Increasing Capacity

### Unification of General Education and Special Education

**S**tate and federal policy toward a unified system. Children are entering our schools with more complex educational, psychological, medical and social needs than ever before. In its *Position Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities* (2001), the Connecticut State Board of Education expressed the following:

*All children are unique and are influenced by cultural, linguistic, intellectual, psychological, medical, social and economic factors. These factors create a need for a varied educational environment that provides for, and accommodates, each child's strengths and areas of needed improvement. The Board also believes that a unified and coordinated continuum of educational opportunities and supports, designed to address individual needs, serves and benefits all students. The Board encourages the implementation of educational models that promote multiple instructional strategies, which encourage and accommodate students in the general environment to the maximum extent appropriate. It is the responsibility and obligation of educators to design and provide teaching strategies, methods and materials that are suitable for each individual learner. As appropriate, a continuum of these strategies should be implemented before a child is referred to special education. (page 1)*

State legislation has called for districts to implement a unified, coordinated system designed to address the individual needs of a broad range of students. Sections 10-74f and 10-223e of the *Connecticut General Statutes*, as amended by Sections 32 and 33 of Public Act 07-3 of the June Special Session focus on school and district improvement relative to increased positive outcomes for all students within the context of school accountability. The school reorganization model and the statewide accountability plan, along with new authority vested with the State Board of Education, require districts to examine teaching and learning practices for their students, develop interventions in response to student needs, and use data to effectively monitor student, school and district progress toward desired outcomes. The Department has established comprehensive systems of monitoring and accountability that support improved outcomes for all students and incorporate the monitoring of IDEA standards involving the performance of students with disabilities.

Many other Connecticut initiatives have strongly encouraged the development of a unified and coordinated educational system. For example, the Early Reading Success (ERS) initiative (Connecticut General Statutes Sections 10-221j to 10-221m, inclusive) established that early intervening services in reading, ongoing assessment of student progress in reading, and avenues for additional help for struggling readers must all be part of the general education system; a referral to special education should not be necessary to provide adequate and appropriate intervention. The Early Intervention Project (EIP), initiated by the Department in 1984 and closely reexamined in 2003, seeks to help educators meet the instructional and behavioral needs of students in the general education classroom. The goals of the EIP include reducing the number of inappropriate referrals to special education and inappropriate special education classification of students, especially students of color. The Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI) aims to accelerate the learning of all students, with special emphasis placed on districts with Title I schools that have been identified as being “in need of improvement” according to NCLB. A pri-

mary goal of CALI involves closing the achievement gaps in Connecticut schools. Connecticut's five-year comprehensive plan for education (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2006) emphasizes high academic achievement for all students in reading, mathematics, writing and science, with a focus on high-need schools and districts.

IDEA 2004 permits districts to use up to 15 percent of their special education funds for any fiscal year to develop and implement coordinated, early intervening services for students in kindergarten through Grade 12 (with an emphasis on K-3) who need additional academic or behavioral support to succeed in the general education environment but who have not been identified as requiring special education or related services. (34 CFR § 300.226[a])

**Roles of general educators and specialists.** The 1999 state guidelines urged districts to “break away from the old service paradigms and create new unified models of service delivery” (p. 10). Districts must continue to develop these kinds of models. Rather than being limited by traditional approaches that view general education, special education and remedial education (e.g., Title I) as separate systems, districts should deploy their human and material resources to meet as broad a range of student needs as possible. Each group of professionals has areas of knowledge and skill that can complement each other when they collaborate effectively. For instance, special educators can provide support to general educators when implementing screening and early intervening services, and general education specialists, such as remedial reading teachers and math specialists, may include students with and without disabilities in the same instructional group when student learning needs are similar. Forthcoming changes in Connecticut's teacher certification regulations and the recently published Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching: Foundational Skills (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2010) support this kind of unified approach. For examples of creative models of service delivery used by school districts in other states to improve the performance of students with disabilities, see *Challenging change: How schools and districts are improving the performance of special education students* (Cortiella and Burnette, 2008).

## Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions to Increase Capacity

A central way for schools to build their capacity to meet a range of student needs is to implement scientific research-based interventions (SRBI). The intent of SRBI, Connecticut's response-to-intervention (RTI) framework (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), is to improve education for all students in prekindergarten through Grade 12. SRBI focuses primarily on core general education practices, core curriculums and instruction, although a variety of support services personnel also play important roles. RTI models combine the use of research-validated practices and interventions in important academic domains (reading, written expression, mathematics), as well as in the behavioral and social-emotional domains, with population-based systems approaches to education. Population-based systems approaches to education involve universal screening and routine progress monitoring of entire populations, for example, screening and progress monitoring of all students within a district in reading, writing, and mathematics. Screening and continued monitoring of student progress are the best ways to detect and address school difficulties at an early stage. The focus of SRBI is core general education instruction, as well as interventions in general education at the onset of concern about student performance. However, special educators and other specialists serve as a fundamental resource for general educators in implementing SRBI and in helping to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Characteristics of a successfully functioning SRBI framework include all of the following:

- core general education curriculums that are comprehensive in addressing a range of essential competencies in each academic domain;

- a comprehensive system of social-emotional learning and behavioral supports;
- a systemic (consistent) schoolwide or districtwide approach to core educational practices, in which teachers within a grade use the same common formative assessments for all students, address the same curriculums and social-emotional competencies, and share the same behavioral expectations;
- the use of research-based, effective instructional strategies both within and across a variety of academic domains;
- differentiation of instruction for all learners, including students performing above and below grade-level expectations and English language learners (ELLs);
- universal screening and progress monitoring, using common assessments of all students that enable teachers to check students' academic and social progress and identify difficulties early;
- prompt intervention for students experiencing academic, social-emotional and/or behavioral difficulties to prevent the development of more serious educational problems later on;
- fidelity of implementation of instruction and interventions, for example, adhering to the treatment time and key features required for a particular intervention;
- educational decision-making driven by data involving students' growth and performance relative to peers — teams of educators analyze these data, with the results applied not only to inform instruction for individual students, but also to evaluate and improve core general education practices and the overall efficacy of interventions; and
- a continuum of support that is part of the general education system and that involves multiple tiers of intervention, with increasing intensity and/or individualization across tiers.

Connecticut implements SRBI (RTI) as a three-tiered model, shown in Figure 1. Tier I involves general education core curriculums, instruction (including differentiation of instruction), and a system of social-emotional learning and behavioral supports for all students. Tier II involves short-term interventions for students with academic or behavioral/social-emotional difficulties who have not responded adequately to Tier I core curriculums and differentiation of instruction. Tier III involves more intensive or individualized short-term interventions for students failing to respond sufficiently to Tier II interventions. It must be emphasized that all three tiers are part of a comprehensive educational system involving scientific, research-based core general education practices and interventions, with supports from a wide range of special services personnel. Most students undergoing tiered interventions will not have disabilities. If interventions are appropriately selected and implemented with fidelity, then most students should not require special education services. See *Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for all Students: Connecticut's Framework for RTI* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c) for more detail on SRBI.

Historically, RTI models developed to a considerable extent from efforts to find a better way to identify learning disabilities than previous identification approaches based on IQ-achievement discrepancy (Fletcher et al., 2007; Spear-Swerling, 2004a). In SRBI (RTI), students with a specific learning disability are conceptualized, at least in part, as those who fail to respond adequately to research-based interventions that are effective for most struggling students. These “poor responders” may require the kind of specialized instruction or especially intensive intervention that is usually provided through special education. Students also must meet other criteria to be identified with a specific learning disability, as discussed in more detail below. Even after being found

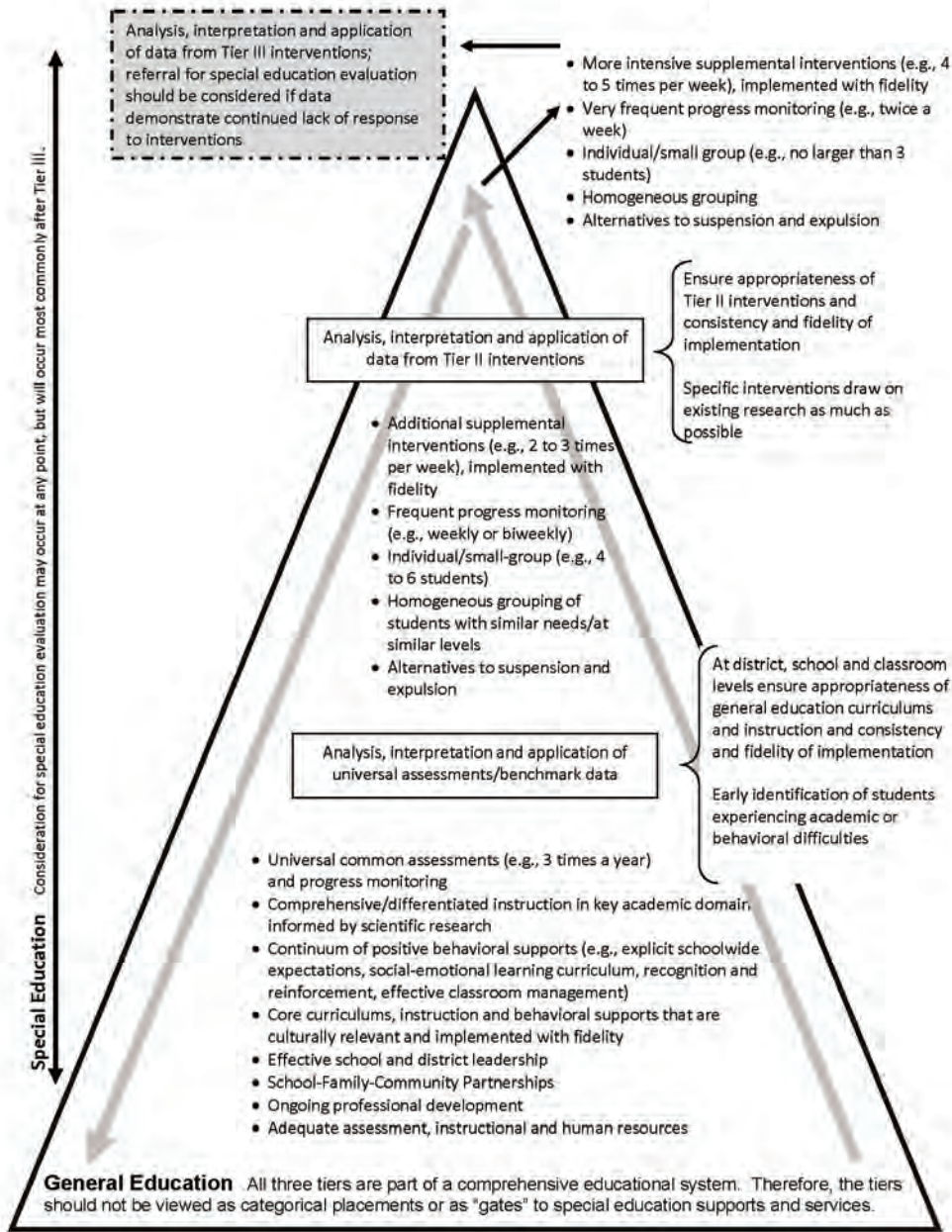


FIGURE I. Connecticut's three-tiered SRBI model.

eligible for special education, students with a specific learning disability, or with other disabilities, will most often continue to receive multitiered general education interventions in coordination with their special education services.

### Identifying & Implementing Scientific Research-Based & Evidence-Based Practices

The use of scientific research-based and evidence-based practices is important not only in core general education practices and Tier II and III interventions, but also in special education. “Scientific research-based” means practices informed by scientific studies that are peer reviewed, that is, examined by scientific experts on the topic of the study prior to its publication; that include experimental control of important extraneous variables such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age; and that use technically adequate (e.g., reliable and valid) measures. The “gold standard” in intervention studies involves well-implemented, randomized controlled trials —

studies that randomly assign participants to different experimental conditions to ensure that a sample is not biased. IDEA 2004 requires that “special education and related services and supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research, to the extent practicable, be provided to the child” (34 CFR § 300.320(a)(4)). In their analysis of terms related to “scientifically based research” in IDEA, Zirkel and Rose (2009) note that while the IDEA 2004 regulations do not specifically define “scientifically based research,” the language “peer-reviewed research” makes the connection clear by expressly incorporating the NCLB definition of scientifically based research. Although educators will not be able to find well-controlled scientific studies to address every issue in educational practice, they should certainly rely on such studies to the extent that they are available. An extensive research base of this type exists for early reading; students with reading disabilities, especially dyslexia; and increasingly, for reading comprehension and vocabulary. Further information on how to identify scientific research-based practices can be found in *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User-Friendly Guide*, which is published by the U.S. Department of Education and available online.

“Evidence-based” is a broader term than “scientific research-based.” This term includes the kinds of studies mentioned above, but it also includes other kinds of data, such as technically adequate school and district data on the overall effectiveness of the three tiers in the three-tiered SRBI/RTI model, as well as data on students’ progress during interventions. Educators should consider such data as well as published scientific studies. For example, as indicated in *Connecticut’s Framework for RTI* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), at least 80 percent of Tier I students in a school should be meeting important benchmarks in a domain in order for core general education practices in that domain to be deemed effective. If a school has relatively large numbers of students being referred for learning disabilities in the area of mathematics, but data from Tier I show that only 50 percent of general education students are meeting important benchmarks in mathematics, then these data indicate that core educational practices in mathematics are not adequate for many students and should be improved. The benchmark data would also suggest that “appropriate instruction” could not be assumed for students referred for evaluation for a specific learning disability in the area of mathematics. Such a systemic issue regarding inappropriate instruction should be considered as part of a comprehensive evaluation but should not be viewed as an automatic “rule-out” that would prohibit an individual student from meeting eligibility criteria as a student with a possible learning disability.

Another valuable set of resources for educators includes evidence-based syntheses, such as those of the National Reading Panel (2000), the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), the National Mathematics Advisory Panel (2008), and *Writing Next* (Graham and Perin, 2007). These resources summarize research findings from a variety of individual studies that meet specific methodological criteria, and are written with an eye toward policy recommendations and implications for educational practice. Most of these reports are available online. Many other useful web-based resources exist for educators interested in identifying scientific research-based practices and interventions, such as those of the Florida Center for Reading Research, the Center on Instruction, the National Center for Learning Disabilities, and the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, to name only a few.

Given that access to scientific research-based interventions may be scarce or even nonexistent in some domains or at certain grade levels, IDEA provides districts with some latitude in verifying that the services or interventions identified by a PPT for use with a particular student are deemed “appropriate.” In response to the operational meaning of scientific research-based or peer-reviewed research-based (PRR) practices in relation to providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) clarified in the Analysis of Comments and Changes to the 2006 Final IDEA 2004 Regulations (*\*NOTE: The language in the Analysis of Comments and Changes to the 2006 Federal Regulations that is cited throughout this document has no legal impact but does provide an analysis of certain important points*

from the federal agency charged with ensuring compliance with Part B of IDEA, the Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP]) that these terms do not mean that “the service with the greatest body of research is the service necessarily required for a child to receive FAPE. Likewise there is nothing in the Act to suggest that the failure of a public agency to provide services based on [scientific research] would automatically result in a denial of FAPE” (*Federal Register*, 71 [156], August 14, 2006, p. 46665). OSEP further stated in the Analysis that districts could “select and use methods that research has shown to be effective, to the extent that methods based on peer-reviewed research are available. . . [and] If no such research exists, the service may still be provided, if the IEP Team determines that such services are appropriate. A child with a disability is entitled to the services that are in his or her IEP whether or not they are based on peer-reviewed research” (*Federal Register*, August 14, 2006, p. 46665).

Once educators have identified appropriate core practices and interventions, implementing them with fidelity is critical. Fidelity of implementation means that core practices and interventions are delivered in the manner they were designed and intended to be used. A written expression intervention that was highly effective in a research study may be completely ineffective if, for example, the sequence of instruction is altered or the time requirements of the intervention are not met. Appropriate matching of interventions to individual student needs also is vital. A math intervention that uses manipulatives to develop conceptual understanding might be highly effective for a student with conceptual weaknesses in math, but not for a conceptually strong student whose primary difficulty involves automatic recall of facts. Fidelity of implementation and appropriate matching of interventions are critical not only for students undergoing tiered interventions, but also for students receiving special education services.

## Families as Partners

Schools reap the rewards of family involvement when they engage in finding reasonable and proactive roles for families in helping to meet student needs. The intent and best practice of school assessment, identification, and intervention incorporates the inclusion of parents and other family members closely involved with a student. Often it is said that the school has a distinct responsibility to “inform parents” — for instance, inform them about the procedural safeguards to protect their child’s right to special education, the vocabulary of assessment, involvement in a general education intervention process, data collection and its use, and their child’s progress and how it is being monitored. However, educators should go beyond merely informing parents. They should also incorporate knowledge from parents and other relevant family members as well as their analysis of their child’s learning, which often provides crucial and unique information for districts to use in the SRBI process and in the identification of specific learning disabilities. During progress monitoring, educators should present data to families in both graphic and numerical formats they can understand easily and should elicit families’ views about the student’s progress or lack thereof. Data supplied to families should also reference expected grade level benchmarks so parents may better understand where their child’s skills are in relation to grade-level expectations. Families should feel they are part of, not only the recipients of, the monitoring of a student’s progress.

## Increasing Capacity in Key Academic Domains

In the key academic domains of reading, mathematics and written expression, schools can take some basic steps to increase their capacity to meet students’ needs. First, schools should ensure their Tier I curriculums and classroom instruction are addressing adequately all the important competencies in a domain. For example, in reading, curriculums and instruction should address

word decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension; in mathematics, calculation skills, concepts and problem solving; and in written expression, basic writing skills such as handwriting and spelling, as well as content, organization of writing, and revision and editing processes. In all these domains, the specific competencies that are important tend to shift across grades. Further information about grade-level expectations in these areas can be found on Connecticut State Department of Education Web site; see especially the lists of K-8 grade level expectations (GLEs), as well as CSDE documents such as *Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2000); *Beyond the Blueprint* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007a); and *A Model for Mathematics Curriculum for Grades PreK-8* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008a).

Second, core general education instruction (i.e., Tier I instruction) in specific academic competencies should be both explicit and systematic. “Explicit” means that students are not expected to infer skills merely from exposure; skills are clearly explained or modeled, and students’ attention is drawn to important features of an example or demonstration. “Systematic” means that skills are taught in a planned, appropriate sequence and students are given sufficient opportunities to practice skills that they have been taught. Instruction should also be scaffolded to facilitate the student’s ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information.

Third, to intervene successfully with struggling students, schools should accurately pinpoint the specific difficulties experienced by a particular student. For example, poor performance in math problem solving might stem from difficulties in any or all of the following: poor math reasoning (e.g., difficulty deciding on the correct operation to use), difficulty reading the problem, limitations in vocabulary knowledge (e.g., not knowing the meaning of math-related words such as *product*), or poor calculation skills. Without accurate pinpointing of specific difficulties, educators cannot appropriately match an intervention to a student’s needs. This pinpointing may sometimes require diagnostic assessments of the student’s functioning in the domain of weakness. As defined in *Connecticut's Framework for RTI* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c) diagnostic assessments are “additional assessments used both by general educators and specialists to clarify and target the needs of individual students when the information provided by other types of assessments, such as universal common assessments [screenings], is not sufficient or too broad” (page 64) and are not to be confused with assessments that might be used during a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for special education. For example, for an eighth-grader experiencing difficulty with written expression, diagnostic assessments might examine areas such as basic writing skills (e.g., handwriting, spelling, sentence structure), quality and organization of content, and use of planning, revision and editing processes. Information from the diagnostic assessments enables appropriate targeting of the writing intervention. If the student’s primary difficulties involve organization of content and use of revision and editing processes, the intervention should focus on those areas rather than on handwriting or spelling. Furthermore, if a PPT eventually determines that a comprehensive evaluation is necessary to determine eligibility for special education services, detailed data from diagnostic assessments can contribute valuable information.

Below are some additional ways for schools to increase capacity, specifically in reading, mathematics and written expression. These academic domains, as well as oral language, are more closely examined below because a student’s lack of achievement in these areas is a necessary component to determine a student’s eligibility for special education due to a possible learning disability. IDEA 2004 identifies eight specific areas that must be examined during the eligibility determination for a specific learning disability: reading decoding, reading fluency, reading comprehension, written expression, oral expression, mathematics calculation and mathematics problem solving, and listening comprehension.

**Reading.** A recent research synthesis, *Developing Early Literacy: The report of the National*

*Early Literacy Panel* (2008), focused on family literacy programs, preschool and kindergarten instructional practices, and interventions during children’s earliest years, birth to kindergarten. This report concluded:

*The code-focused instructional efforts reported statistically significant and moderate to large effects across a broad spectrum of early literacy outcomes. Code-focused interventions consistently demonstrated positive effects directly on children’s conventional literacy skills. Book-sharing interventions produced statistically significant and moderate-sized effects on children’s print knowledge and oral language skills, and the home and parent programs yielded statistically significant and moderate to large effects on children’s oral language skills and general cognitive abilities. Studies of preschool and kindergarten programs produced significant and moderate to large effects on spelling and reading readiness. Finally, language-enhancement interventions were successful at increasing children’s oral language skills to a large and statistically significant degree. Together, these findings suggest that there are many things that parents and preschools can do to improve the literacy development of their young children and that different approaches influence the development of a different pattern of essential skills. (page ix)*

The National Reading Panel report, *Teaching Children to Read* (2000), emphasized the importance of addressing five critical components of reading in the primary grades:

- phonemic awareness — awareness of and the ability to manipulate phonemes, or speech sounds, in spoken words;
- phonics — the ability to use knowledge of letter sounds and common letter patterns to decode unfamiliar words;
- fluency — the ability to read text not just accurately, but also quickly and with ease;
- vocabulary — knowledge of the meaning of words; and
- comprehension — understanding what has been read or heard.

IDEA 2004 states that a student may not be determined to be a student with a specific learning disability if there is a lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including these essential components of reading instruction that are defined in section 1209(3) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also known as NCLB (34 CFR § 300.306(b)(1)(i); 20 USC 6368 §1208(c)). According to *Connecticut’s Blueprint for Reading* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2000) a primary grade reading curriculum that provides skillful, explicit, systematic instruction in these five areas can do a great deal to prevent reading problems in many students. Beyond Grade 1, normally achieving readers no longer require instruction in phonemic awareness, and beyond Grade 3, normally achieving readers no longer require basic phonics instruction (although they may require some continued instruction in applying structural analysis to read multisyllabic words). However, struggling readers may need instruction in phonemic awareness and basic phonics skills well beyond Grade 3. In such cases, it is important to conduct assessments that target these areas, substantiating the need for intervention and providing instruction and intervention that meet individual student needs. Especially as students advance into the middle and upper elementary grades, *Beyond the Blueprint: Literacy in Grades 4-12 and Across the Content Areas* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007a) notes that explicit teaching of vocabulary and a range of comprehension strategies are vital to enable students to meet demands for understanding the more sophisticated texts used at these grade levels.

Across the K-12 grade range, research suggests that three patterns of reading difficulties are common (Badian, 1999; Catts, Hogan, and Adlof, 2005; Leach, Scarborough and Rescorla, 2003;



see Spear-Swerling, 2004b for discussion of the patterns in relation to students' Connecticut Mastery Test performance):

- Specific word decoding difficulties, characterized by difficulty with phonics skills and often accompanied by poor phonemic awareness; the student has age-appropriate oral vocabulary and oral comprehension of language;
- Specific reading comprehension difficulties, characterized by poor reading comprehension despite the fact that the student has age-appropriate phonemic awareness and phonics skills; and
- Mixed reading difficulties, characterized by difficulties with phonics skills and often with phonemic awareness, but also by reading comprehension problems that exceed what can be accounted for by poor word decoding; for example, a student may have trouble comprehending text even when he or she can read the words well.

General education interventions should appropriately target the needs of students with reading difficulties. Students with specific word decoding difficulties typically require explicit, systematic teaching of phonics, integrated with phonemic awareness instruction if the student has a weakness in that area. Students with specific reading comprehension difficulties require explicit teaching of their particular weaknesses in the domain of comprehension. Examples of possible weaknesses in the domain of comprehension include limited knowledge of vocabulary, lack of understanding of text structure, difficulties with sentence structure, limited background knowledge, or difficulty making inferences. Students with mixed reading difficulties require both types of intervention, in phonics/phonemic awareness and in their specific comprehension needs.

All these patterns of difficulty may be accompanied by poor fluency of reading, which is slow or labored reading of text with poor prosody. Prosody refers to the use of appropriate intonation and phrasing (e.g., pauses at commas or periods) in oral reading. Poor fluency creates a drain on comprehension, tends to reduce students' motivation to read, and makes it difficult for students to meet upper grade level demands involving a high volume of reading. If a student has poor fluency, that need also should be addressed through fluency-building interventions (Hudson, Lane and Pullen, 2005).

**Written Expression.** Many similarities can be drawn between reading and writing, and helping students to make linkages between the two is important (Shanahan, 2009). For instance, in learning about different types of text structure, such as narrative versus expository writing, texts that students read can serve as useful models for their writing; in writing about a text they have read, students may also develop their comprehension skills. Furthermore, reading and written expression draw upon many of the same underlying language abilities, such as phonological processing, vocabulary, and syntactic competence.

However, written expression is not merely the inverse of reading (Berninger, Abbott, Jones, Gould, Anderson-Youngstrom, Shimada, and Apel, 2006; Fitzgerald and Shanahan, 2000). Rather, skilled written expression is a cognitively effortful, demanding activity that involves a formal type of communication produced in the absence of a listener. A convenient distinction in written expression distinguishes basic writing skills, sometimes called transcription skills, from text generation (Berninger and Amtmann, 2003).

Basic writing skills involve handwriting or keyboarding, spelling, mechanics of writing (e.g., capitalization and punctuation), and sentence structure (e.g., writing complete, grammatical sentences). Text generation is the translation of ideas into language. Put another way, text generation is the generation of content (text) on the page. It requires translating one's ideas into language at the level of individual words (e.g., using appropriate vocabulary), sentences (e.g., writing sentences that express the author's meaning clearly), and extended discourse (e.g., developing a thought, plot, or argument across multiple sentences and paragraphs). Fluent basic writing skills

can help to serve as a foundation for written expression. Weaknesses in these skills can create a drain on students' abilities to generate text and can impair their motivation to write (Graham and Perin, 2007).

Some common characteristics of struggling writers (Berninger and Amtmann, 2003; Graham and Perin, 2007) are:

- poor handwriting;
- poor spelling (which may be associated with word decoding problems in reading);
- poor use of basic mechanics (e.g., capitalization or punctuation);
- difficulties with text-generation aspects of writing such as poor word choice, lack of elaboration or detail, poor organization of content, and lack of clarity (which are sometimes, but not always, associated with oral language weaknesses such as limitations in vocabulary or grammatical weaknesses);
- failure to use planning process in writing;
- a reluctance to revise and edit writing, difficulty recognizing errors, or lack of knowledge of how to correct errors; and
- lack of motivation to write (often because the process of getting ideas on paper is perceived as laborious).

The approach to writing taken by students with learning disabilities often focuses on generating content but includes little planning, monitoring and evaluating: “Little effort is made to evaluate or rework [these] ideas or to consider the constraints imposed by the topic, the needs of the audience, or the organization of text. The resulting composition is generally a list of topic-related ideas rather than a coherent discussion or examination of the topic” (Graham and Harris, 2003, p. 324). Another characteristic of writing of students with learning disabilities is low production. Graham and Harris (2003) provide related reasons: difficulty sustaining the writing effort, failure to access what is known about a topic, and difficulty with the process of generating content due to interference of the mechanics of writing.

The previously cited studies, as well as others, support the need for general education instruction in three broad areas of written expression:

- basic writing skills, including handwriting, keyboarding, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure;
- text generation, that is, content aspects of writing involving translating one's ideas into language (e.g., use of varied and appropriate vocabulary; elaboration of detail; and the quality, clarity and organization of ideas); and
- executive processes involving planning, revision, and editing of writing.

As in other academic domains, interventions for written expression should appropriately target the needs of the struggling writer. In addition, educators should recognize the role that weaknesses in basic writing skills can play in students' loss of motivation to write. In a meta-analysis of studies designed to improve the writing of students with learning disabilities, Gersten and Baker (2001) identified three components of writing interventions that contribute to improved outcomes: 1) adhering to a basic framework of planning, writing, and revision; 2) explicitly teaching critical steps in the writing process, such as text structures; and 3) providing frequent feedback, guided by the information explicitly taught, about strengths, missing elements, and overall writing quality.

Executive control processes during planning, organization, revision and editing, play a critical role in successful writing production. Graham, Harris and Olinghouse (2007) delineate

various aspects of executive function related to writing: analysis (e.g., defining the problem and elements of a writing task), decision making and planning (e.g., setting a goal, exploring possible approaches, devising a plan of action), execution and coordination of mental and affective resources (including motivation and memory), attentional control (e.g., sustaining effort and inhibiting interfering thoughts and behaviors), and flexible adaptation. Further, Fletcher et al. (2001) conclude, “Reflecting the core cognitive impairment in executive functions that characterize many students who struggle with composing, teaching children explicit strategies for composing that focus on problem-solving, planning, and self-regulation in the context of writing leads to improvement in written expression” (page 258).

In the early grades, a modest amount of time devoted to explicit instruction in handwriting may help to avoid written expression problems later (Berninger, 2010; Graham, Harris and Fink, 2000). Early handwriting and spelling instruction should be integrated with beginning reading instruction; for example, as students are learning how to form letters in handwriting, they can also be learning the sounds of the letters. At all grade levels, including the primary grades, writing instruction should include the text generation aspects of writing, the use of planning and revision processes in writing, writing for enjoyment, and development of writing knowledge such as the idea of writing for an intended audience or purpose.

Beyond the elementary grades, normally achieving students usually need relatively less attention to basic writing skills and relatively more attention to the other aspects of writing mentioned above. However, this may not be true for students with learning disabilities in adolescence. During this time, school may be especially challenging as adolescents are faced with more complex writing tasks and greater demands for independent work, while aversion to writing may have increased. Expository writing intensifies in the secondary grades and its demands may be particularly noteworthy for the student with a specific learning disability (Englert, Okolo and Mariage, 2009; Hallenbeck, 2002).

It is important to give attention to the use of technology in writing, including keyboarding skills, spelling and grammar checkers, and software programs that assist in the organization and generation of content, especially as students advance into the secondary grades. Technology can facilitate revision and editing, and assist in developing skills essential to success in postsecondary education or the workplace. MacArthur (2006) notes that research offers “support for the use of some forms of technology to help students with LD and other struggling writers compensate for problems with basic transcription” (page 255). However, he emphasizes the need for caution in the use of assistive technology: “Whether a new tool increases or decreases the overall burden of writing depends on the capabilities of the individual student, the training provided, and the demands of the setting” (page 255). Others also voice this caveat (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2007; Berninger and Amtmann, 2003). Research findings regarding the efficacy of technology with students with learning disabilities continue to emerge. MacArthur (2006; 2009a; 2009b) reiterates the positive effects of the use of word processing with struggling writers and research supporting the benefit of word prediction and speech recognition applications for some students.

**Mathematics.** The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2000) identified six principles important in mathematics education: a) equity — math is for all students, regardless of personal characteristics, background, or physical challenges; b) curriculum — math should be viewed as an integrated whole, as opposed to isolated facts to be learned or memorized; c) teaching — effective mathematics teaching requires a deep understanding of math, individual student development, and how children learn math; d) learning — students will learn mathematics with understanding through classes that promote problem solving, thinking and reasoning, and connecting new knowledge to existing knowledge in meaningful ways; e) assessment — assessment of student performance, growth, and understanding via varied techniques (e.g., portfolios, math assessments embedded in real-world problems) that support and furnish useful information

to both teachers and students; and f) technology — electronic technologies such as calculators and computers are essential in teaching, learning and doing math by providing opportunities for exploration and concept representation.

A recent evidence-based research synthesis by the National Mathematics Advisory Panel (2008) emphasized the importance of ensuring that students are adequately prepared for success in algebra in late middle school or early high school, because “algebra is a demonstrable gateway to later achievement” (page xiii) as well as to later employment and earnings. In the view of this math panel: “A major goal for K-8 mathematics education should be proficiency with fractions (including decimals, percent, and negative fractions), for such proficiency is foundational for algebra and, at the present time, seems to be severely underdeveloped. Proficiency with whole numbers is a necessary precursor for the study of fractions, as are aspects of measurement and geometry. These three areas—whole numbers, fractions, and particular aspects of geometry and measurement—are the Critical Foundations of Algebra” (page xvii). The panel’s other recommendations include the following:

- The mathematics curriculum in prekindergarten-Grade 8 should be streamlined and should emphasize a well-defined set of the most critical topics in the early grades.
- Use should be made of what is clearly known from rigorous research about how children learn, especially by recognizing a) the advantages for children in having a strong start; b) the mutually reinforcing benefits of conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and automatic (i.e., quick and effortless) recall of facts; and c) that effort, not just inherent talent, counts in mathematical achievement.
- Instructional practice should be informed by high-quality research, when available, and by the best professional judgment and experience of accomplished classroom teachers. High-quality research does not support the contention that instruction should be either entirely “student centered” or “teacher directed.” Research indicates that some forms of particular instructional practices can have a positive impact under specified conditions. (pages xiii-xiv).

Research in the area of mathematics and mathematics disabilities, while not as extensive as in the area of reading, continues to grow and the results are promising for educators who must design instruction and interventions for students. For example, a study of at-risk first-graders that examined the prevention and identification of mathematics disabilities concluded that first-grade interventions can be effective in promoting stronger math outcomes for students (Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, Paulson, Bryant and Hamlett, 2005). Baker, Gersten and Lee (2002) examined 15 studies involving students with a variety of mathematics difficulties. They found four interventions that were associated with improvement in math achievement: a) providing data on student performance to teachers and to the students themselves; b) structured, peer-assisted learning activities; c) providing feedback to parents on student achievement; and d) explicit teaching of math concepts and procedures.

Common difficulties in mathematics include the following:

- poor automatic recall of basic facts, such as addition facts or multiplication tables;
- poor knowledge of algorithms (written procedures) for multidigit calculation, such as addition with regrouping or long division, as well as lack of fluency in performing these written procedures;
- difficulty with math-related language, such as meanings of common math terms (e.g., *equal*, *product*, *numerator*, *rhombus*) or the language of word problems (e.g., knowing the meanings of words such as *reduce* or *expand*);
- difficulty understanding basic concepts such as the base ten system or fraction concepts; and

- difficulty solving word problems.

Math interventions should address the specific needs of struggling math students. Explicit, systematic teaching of skills in a student's weak areas, with opportunities for practice and cumulative review of learned skills, is important. For conceptual difficulties and difficulties with problem solving, the use of visual representations such as manipulatives or pictures also is extremely helpful (Baker et al., 2002; Fuchs and Fuchs, 2008).

## From the Elementary Level to the Secondary Level

During the middle school and high school years, all students face numerous challenges in negotiating the transition from elementary to secondary school contexts. First, students must adjust to structural differences such as switching classrooms for instruction by multiple teachers across different disciplines. Moreover, multiple teachers often lead to increases in the volume of work. Second, transition from the neighborhood school to centralized locations often interrupts longitudinal understanding of student characteristics by educators. Third, literacy becomes less and less a part of the general education curriculum at the middle and high school levels. As content learning becomes the central focus of instruction, students who lack foundational skills and strategies begin to fall further behind. Finally, a central characteristic of secondary schools is a substantial increase in the academic, social, executive and motivational demands on students, including a significant shift in the nature and pace of content-based instruction (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2005). Individually or collectively, these challenges may exacerbate underlying achievement problems for students or may cause achievement difficulties to emerge in a student who has not previously manifested difficulties.

Additionally, physiological changes coupled with increased peer pressures and the need for social acceptance may compete strongly with a student's attention to academics. It is common to see a decline in students' academic performance due to social, attention, homework completion and/or organizational problems. General education at the middle and high school levels should address these common problems for all students through the following kinds of measures:

- handling homework assignments in a uniform manner throughout a school building and/or district;
- teaching note-taking skills explicitly at a specified grade level, with continued, consistent direct application, monitoring and support for the development of those skills throughout subsequent grade levels;
- Teaching organizational and study skills explicitly at a specified grade level, with continued, consistent direct application, monitoring and support for the development of those skills throughout subsequent grade levels;
- teaching keyboarding and computer skills directly;
- making computers and other technology available in classrooms for spontaneous use;
- making assistance in the above areas available for students needing additional practice or further explanation; and
- ensuring that efforts are made to actively involve students in the learning process to increase motivation and engagement (Guthrie and Humenick, 2004).

Although SRBI shares common components at the elementary and secondary levels (e.g., universal screening, tiered interventions), middle and secondary schools should pay special attention to the following in implementing an SRBI framework:

- reallocation of staff with expertise in specialized instruction as consultants, collaborators

and implementers across multiple tiers;

- continuous professional development to meet student needs across multiple tiers of instruction without watering down the curriculum;
- clear implementation of a schoolwide continuum of literacy instruction to meet the needs of *all* learners in the school, including methods for addressing content area literacy;
- changes in infrastructure that support collaboration between teachers, administrators, and staff between grade levels and across content areas;
- careful monitoring at both the classroom and building level of variations in intensity of instruction and length of time students spend at each tier of instruction; and
- creation of a team to manage schoolwide student academic and behavioral data for instructional and placement decision making, including a broad range of stakeholders (e.g., administrators, general and special educators, community representation). This group might also coordinate annual reading, writing and mathematics assessments, as well as benchmark assessments (typically given every nine weeks) for subject areas so there is a consistent, schoolwide method of assessing progress on an ongoing basis.

For English language learners at the secondary level, acquisition of the academic language needed for success at advanced levels of schooling may take significantly longer than acquisition of conversational English (August and Hakuta, 1998). Academic language includes not only knowledge of individual vocabulary words, but also the ability to engage in spoken and written discourse on a given technical topic; for instance, being able to comprehend a word problem in mathematics and explain its solution. Due to limitations in English academic language, English language learners may find the reading comprehension, mathematics and written expression demands at the middle and secondary levels challenging, especially if they have only recently started to learn English. Adequate Tier I differentiation of instruction and explicit teaching of academic language and vocabulary, particularly in content areas, is critical for these students.

## School Climate, Social-Emotional Learning and Classroom Management

Increasing evidence demonstrates a connection between problem behavior and academic difficulties (Lane, O’Shaughnessy, Lambros, Gresham and Beebe-Frankenberger, 2002; Nelson, Benner, and Gonzalez, 2003; Torgesen et al., 1999). The causal relationships between behavior and academic achievement are complex; problem behaviors can affect a student’s academic achievement, but learning difficulties can also affect a student’s behavior, as when a student becomes frustrated or loses interest in schoolwork that is overly challenging. A healthy school climate, teaching of important social-emotional skills, such as interpersonal skills, and positive behavior supports that facilitate effective classroom environments are all preventive steps toward reducing potential for academic difficulties.

In recognition of this key relationship between behavior/social-emotional functioning and academic achievement, many tiered intervention models, including Connecticut’s *Framework for RTI*, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), combine attention to both academic and behavioral/social-emotional needs. The Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative’s (CALI) module on school climate, *Improving School Climate to Support Student Achievement: Creating “Climates of Respect,”* expands on the relationship between school climate and academic achievement by examining the implications of addressing school climate in alignment with RTI/SRBI. As of March 2010, the National School Climate Council released a new tool, the National School Climate Standards, which provides standards-based criteria to further support the efforts of RTI/SRBI and CALI in this area in Connecticut districts.

Evidence of appropriate classroom instruction is one important variable to consider in the determination of eligibility for a specific learning disability. In “ruling-out” lack of appropriate instruction, the concept should be expanded to include not only utilization of scientific research-based instructional strategies, but also implementation of effective classroom management practices in the classroom in which the strategies are being provided. In fact, as attention to combined tiered intervention models for promoting academic and behavior success increases (Stewart, Benner, Martella and Marchand-Martella, 2007), the role of classroom management practices toward facilitating or hindering student success in the classroom has increased importance in both assessment and intervention.

A concise review suggests that evidence-based practices in the area of classroom management might be grouped into five basic suggestions for “best practices” (see Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, and Sugai, 2008). These suggestions include:

- *Maximize structure.* Use explicit classroom routines and minimize crowding and distractions as much as possible.
- *Post, teach, review, monitor and reinforce expectations.* Expectations for behavior and social-emotional learning should be positively stated, posted in a prominent location and should be taught directly in the same manner as academic skills.
- *Actively engage students in observable ways.* Methods for promoting active engagement include increasing the number of opportunities that students have to respond (e.g., through choral responding), providing choices to students where feasible, and ensuring that work is at an appropriate level of challenge (i.e., not too easy or too difficult).
- *Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior.* Strategies for increasing desirable behavior include delivering specific, contingent praise, implementing group contingencies and/or token economies, and constructing behavior contracts.
- *Use a continuum of strategies to respond to inappropriate behavior.* Strategies for decreasing undesirable behavior include delivering specific, contingent error corrections, using differential reinforcement techniques, implementing response-cost procedures, and time out.

Specific examples of how classroom management strategies might be implemented are readily available online.

## Intervention and Teacher Assistance Teams

School personnel must ensure that alternative procedures and interventions in general education have been explored and, where appropriate, implemented before a student is referred to a PPT (Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, Section 10-76d-7). Most schools have an intervention/teacher assistance team process in place to support teachers who are attempting to effect change in a student's learning. Within an SRBI approach, data teams, defined in *Connecticut's Framework for RTI* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c) as teams of educators who are responsible for data analysis and decision making, and early intervention teams, can also provide this type of support. These teams function at the level of the district, school, and grade (or content area) as well as across grade levels in the same content area (i.e., vertical teams). Data team members can include school administrators, school psychologists, grade/content area general educators, special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, various specialists and other support or behavioral/mental health personnel. The SRBI process includes examining data, but also involves designing assessment, instruction and interventions and making decisions at individual, school and district levels. This team process, regardless of the name of the team, enables teachers to collaborate and solve problems in a constructive, collegial atmosphere. The existence of a well-defined, effective team process is essential to ensure that a student has access to appropriate general education interventions before a referral to special education is considered (Drame, 2002).

## When is Referral to Special Education Appropriate?

Students can be referred for an evaluation for a specific learning disability at any time, including during *any* tier of SRBI/RTI instruction. The state regulations require that “provision shall be made for the prompt referral to a planning and placement team of all children who have been suspended repeatedly or whose behavior, attendance or progress in school is considered unsatisfactory or at a marginal level of acceptance” (see Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, Section 10-76d-7). State regulations also require that before a student is referred to a PPT, “alternative procedures and programs in regular education shall be explored and, where appropriate, implemented.” Documentation of such early intervening services were required on the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report for students suspected of having a specific learning disability in the 1999 state guidelines to assist in ruling out that a student's difficulties were not due to lack of appropriate instruction in math or reading. However, SRBI, while similar to the implementation of early intervening services, is a much more comprehensive, systemic process used to document a student's response to appropriate instruction and intervention. One way in which data regarding “alternative procedures and programs in regular education” can be obtained is through a district's SRBI/RTI process.

Once schools are implementing an effective SRBI/RTI process, referrals most likely will occur after multiple attempts at short-term, well-targeted, research-based interventions have documented a student's inadequate progress in those interventions, with regard both to the level of performance and the rate of growth during interventions. Documentation of inadequate progress also should consider numerous additional factors beyond the individual student's performance and rate of growth, as discussed at length in sections 4 and 5. Students should not be referred to special education simply because they need academic assistance and special education is the only avenue for extra help. Schools should have comprehensive and evidence-based general education



practices, differentiation of instruction for all learners, and scientific research-based interventions that provide a continuum of educational opportunities to students as part of the general education program. However, if alternatives within general education have demonstrated minimal results and a team suspects that a student's learning difficulties are not due to a lack of appropriate instruction, the student should be referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services due to a possible learning disability.

Regardless of when in the SRBI process a referral occurs, once a referral is received, the district must convene a PPT to review the referral and decide if an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services is warranted. The PPT may determine that a comprehensive evaluation is not needed. If parents disagree with this determination, they have the right to challenge it formally in a variety of ways (see page 25, "The Role and Rights of Families in the Special Education Evaluation Process").

## 3 | Identification of a Specific Learning Disability and Determining Eligibility for Special Education

### Determining the Need for a Comprehensive Evaluation

**W**hen a student is referred to a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) because a specific learning disability is suspected, the PPT must first review information to determine whether a comprehensive evaluation needs to be conducted. In making this decision, the team should consider whether “alternative procedures and programs” were implemented in regular education. Some of the questions the team should explore as they decide whether the student should be evaluated to determine eligibility for special education:

- Has the student been in general education, had reasonable exposure to the curriculum and been actively engaged in instruction?
- What types of strategies and interventions have been used to instruct and support the student? Have the strategies and interventions been successful? Why or why not? Are there additional general education strategies and interventions that should be in place and tried before a comprehensive evaluation is considered?
- Are there data to suggest that the student has received appropriate instruction, including math and reading interventions with ongoing progress monitoring and formative evaluation of specific skills?
- Have data been collected and reviewed to determine that the student has not met benchmark expectations?
- Might the student’s learning problems be primarily due to a visual, hearing, or motor impairment, or to a disability other than a specific learning disability? If so, the team should consider recommending an appropriate evaluation based on these concerns.
- Has the impact of the student’s sociocultural background been considered? Has the student been provided with culturally relevant instruction?

IDEA 2004 regulations require the “rule out” of a lack of appropriate instruction and documentation that underachievement is not the reason for a student’s suspected learning difficulties; therefore, the PPT “must ensure that the student was provided appropriate instruction in regular education settings, delivered by qualified personnel” (34 CFR § 300.309[b]). However, OSEP clearly states in the Analysis of Comments and Changes to the 2006 Final Regulations that “an RTI process does not replace the need for a comprehensive evaluation” (*Federal Register*, 71[156], August 14, 2006, page 46647) and in fact indicates that none of the options for determining the identification of a specific learning disability in the regulations, in and of themselves, fulfill the requirement of a “comprehensive evaluation” (p. 46648). In designing a comprehensive evaluation, a PPT must review existing data, including any evaluative data gathered during the SRBI process. It is possible that based on a review of existing data (e.g., SRBI/RTI data; vision/hearing screenings; statewide academic assessments — CMT/CAPT; curriculum based assessments), the PPT will have sufficient information to determine if a student has a disability and therefore, this review of existing data may qualify as the comprehensive evaluation required for identification and writing of the individualized education program.

## The Role and Rights of Families in the Special Education Evaluation Process

Parents and other family members or adults acting in the place of a biological or adoptive parent including a grandparent, stepparent or other relative with whom the student lives, or an individual who is legally responsible for the student's welfare are able to provide educators and evaluators with information critical to understanding the student's background as well as her or his strengths and weaknesses.

IDEA 2004 requires that school personnel collect and consider parental input when designing an initial comprehensive evaluation or reevaluation, as well as in the determination of eligibility for special education (34 CFR §§ 300.304[b][1], 300.305[a][1][i] & 300.305[a][2], 300.306[c][1][i]). In determining if a student has a specific learning disability, districts are required under IDEA 2004 to document that families were provided with information about the district's SRBI process, including general education services, intervention strategies, and the amount and nature of student performance data that is to be collected (34 CFR § 300.311[7][ii]).

School personnel should notify families promptly about any concerns involving a student's behavior, social-emotional functioning or academic performance. Families should be provided with continuing information about the student's progress on assessments. Throughout the SRBI process, families should have opportunities to participate in team meetings and decision making about the student's program, including decisions about whether a comprehensive evaluation for special education is warranted. During the special education evaluation process, families must receive data-based documentation that reflects the formal assessment of the student's progress during instruction (34 CFR § 300.309[b][2]) and how such data compare to grade level benchmarks. This information can be obtained from previous documentation of early intervening services or from the documentation of a student's response to appropriate instruction via the Reading, Writing, or Mathematics Worksheets. The worksheets are included as part of the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report that is completed on all students referred for a possible learning disability. Students who are participating in a comprehensive special education evaluation should continue to have access to interventions through general education. When educators take steps to inform families about SRBI that is designed to improve education for all students, share information and listen and respond to families' concerns, they can provide a better educational program for the student and avoid many potential problems. Parental input is required when the PPT is planning the initial evaluation or reevaluation, as well as when determining eligibility for special education services. Consideration should be given to language, culture, accessibility, and other factors that may inhibit gathering this input and which may require adaptation of the interview format or use of an interpreter.

Some examples of information that parents and families can supply that may be helpful in planning an appropriate evaluation include:

- the student's developmental history (e.g., a prior history of language delay puts the student at added risk for reading difficulties);
- family dynamics and history, including recent situational trauma such as divorce or death of a family member;
- the student's medical/health history, including vision, hearing, injuries, accidents, illnesses;
- family perceptions of the student's specific strengths and weaknesses;
- the student's prior learning opportunities such as access to preschool, native language instruction or out-of-school tutoring;
- the student's cultural and linguistic background and its possible impact on achievement, behavior or social-emotional functioning; and

- the student's functional abilities in nonschool settings (e.g., ability to complete assigned chores at home, performance in part-time jobs for secondary students).

As specified in IDEA 2004, families and school personnel always have the right to refer a student for consideration of eligibility for special education services by requesting an evaluation at *any time*, including *prior* to completion of an SRBI process. The PPT must respond to all referrals by holding a PPT meeting to determine whether a comprehensive evaluation is warranted. However, a PPT may conclude, through analysis of data that documents a student's progress through the use of appropriate, technically adequate assessments, that a student is making sufficient, adequate progress through SRBI, and that a comprehensive special education evaluation therefore is currently unnecessary. Families then would have the right to challenge that conclusion through a complaint resolution or due process hearing if they choose. Mediation is also available as a way to resolve this dispute if both the parents and the school district agree to participate. A PPT may also determine that a trial diagnostic placement (i.e., structured placement of not more than eight weeks' duration with diagnostic goals and objectives reviewed by the PPT every two weeks) is appropriate to assess the needs of a student for whom an IEP may be needed but for whom the evaluation is either inconclusive or the data insufficient to determine the student's individualized education program (Regulations of State Agencies, Section 10-76d-14(b)). A diagnostic placement is an evaluation.

Unless the parent and the district mutually agree to extend the timeline as indicated in IDEA, (34 CFR § 300.309(c)), the initial evaluation must be conducted within 60 calendar days of receiving parental consent for the evaluation. If the district and parent agree to extend the timeline, the extension must be documented by the school district according to the criteria on the Mutual Agreement to Extend Evaluation Timeline for Determining Special Education Eligibility for a Student with a Specific Learning Disability form, ED 637, in Appendix C. Please note that this agreement may affect the State timeline for IEP implementation within 45 school days of the referral (Section 10-76d-13 of the CT State Regulations). In these cases, this agreement permits an extension to this requirement as well.

For students who attend private schools, charter schools, or are home schooled, the public school district conducting the initial evaluation or reevaluation may need to

*obtain information from parents and teachers about the curricula used and the child's progress with various teaching strategies . . . information from current classroom-based assessments or classroom observations may also need to be used. On the basis of the available information, the [PPT] may identify other information that is needed to determine whether the child's low achievement is due to a disability, and not primarily the result of lack of appropriate instruction. The requirements for special education eligibility . . . are not affected, and do not differ, by the location or venue of a child's instruction. (See Analysis of Comments and Changes to the 2006 Final Regulations, Federal Register, 71 [156], August 14, 2006, p. 46656.)*

Therefore, it is important that the PPT has the information it needs to ensure that the student's underachievement is not the result of a lack of appropriate instruction.

### Design of a Comprehensive Evaluation

Although documentation of a student's inadequate response to intervention is required (see 34 CFR § 300.311[a][7]), an individually designed comprehensive evaluation must be conducted in order to determine a student's eligibility for special education as a student with a specific learning disability. Several researchers (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2009; McKenzie, 2009; Ofiesh, 2006) note that the "non-response" status identified during an RTI/SRBI process for a student who

has not been successful with tiered interventions, in and of itself, is incapable of distinguishing a specific learning disability from other possible causes of low achievement. Along with other professional organizations (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children, 2008; Learning Disability Association, 2006), they recommend that the implementation of RTI (SRBI) must be accompanied by the option to initiate a referral for a comprehensive evaluation at any time during the instructional process. Essentially, this idea is supported in the IDEA 2004 regulations by respecting the expertise of the professionals and the parents who are designing a comprehensive evaluation to determine which data are relevant for eligibility determination of a specific learning disability and educational planning (Lichtenstein and Klotz, 2007).

To help ensure that an evaluation is comprehensive, the PPT must first gather input from multiple sources (e.g., families, general education classroom, curriculum-based measures, standardized assessments, student records, observations) and include a review of existing evaluation data to determine what additional data, if any, are needed to identify a learning disability, a student's need for special education, and write an IEP. Included in this review must be any evaluative data gathered during the SRBI process as well as other academic and behavioral data that can be used to rule out that the student's learning difficulties are due to a lack of appropriate instruction. It is possible that based on a review of existing data, the PPT will have sufficient information to determine if the student has a disability and to determine her or his educational needs. This review of existing data may qualify as the comprehensive evaluation required for identification and writing the IEP.

If a review of existing data is not sufficient to identify whether a student has a learning disability, a comprehensive evaluation must be planned by the child's parents and the members of the PPT that includes, among others, the student's regular education teacher, at least one specialist qualified to conduct individual student diagnostic examinations (e.g., school psychologist, special educator, speech-language pathologist, reading teacher) (Connecticut State Regulations Section 10-76d-10 and 34 CFR § 300.308 and 300.321) and other qualified professionals as appropriate. When planning the evaluation, the PPT must: 1) use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the student, including information provided by the parents; 2) not use any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion for determining whether the student is a student with a disability; 3) use technically sound (i.e., valid and reliable) instruments that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors in addition to physical or developmental factors; 4) use assessments that are tailored to assess areas of specific educational need and not merely those that are designed to provide a general intelligence quotient; 5) assess a student in all areas related to the suspected disability; and 6) use measures that are sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of a student's special, education and related service needs (34 CFR §§ 300.304[b]&[c]). Section 10-76d-9(b)(2) of the state regulations also requires that the results of standardized or local tests of ability, aptitude, affect, achievement and aspiration not be exclusively used as the basis for placement. The state regulations further specify that the sociocultural background of a student be considered in a comprehensive evaluation, including, in the case of a student dominant in a language other than English, systematic teacher observation of the specific areas of concern. Furthermore, detailed information about the student's performance at home and in the community and any prescriptive or diagnostic teaching that has taken place shall be included (See Section 10-76d-9[a][2] of the state regulations).

Evaluations for a specific learning disability must consider all of the following:

- input from families;
- any educationally relevant medical findings;
- data relevant to exclusionary criteria (e.g., hearing screenings, vision screenings, school attendance, determination of English language proficiency if a student is an English lan-

guage learner, documentation of appropriate instruction); and

- information indicating whether the student’s difficulties require special education and related services.

When determining whether a student has a learning disability, the PPT must ensure the student is observed in her or his learning environment, including the general education classroom, to document the student’s academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty (34 CFR § 300.310). Information may be used from an observation that was obtained before a student’s referral for an evaluation, or a member of the PPT may conduct such an observation as part of the initial evaluation after the student has been referred. If a student is less than school age or is out of school, a member of the PPT must observe the student in an environment appropriate for the age of the student.

After the PPT meeting during which the evaluations are selected, school personnel must provide prior written notice to parents that describes any proposed evaluation procedures (34 CFR § 300.503). If the evaluation is the initial evaluation to determine eligibility, the parent must provide written consent before it is conducted. All evaluations must be consistent with the requirements of IDEA 2004, including the requirements that:

*Each public agency must ensure that the following requirements are met: Assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a child under Part B of the Act— (i) Are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis; (ii) Are provided and administered in the child’s native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to so provide or administer; (iii) Are used for the purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable; (iv) Are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel; and (v) Are administered in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of the assessments (34 CFR § 300.304[c][1]).*

### Federal Requirements for Eligibility

For a student to be identified as having a specific learning disability and be eligible for special education under IDEA 2004, the following criteria must be met:

1. The child does not achieve adequately for the child’s age or meet state-approved, grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child’s age or state-approved, grade-level standards: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem-solving (34 CFR § 300.309[a][1]).
2. The child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or state-approved, grade-level standards in one or more of the areas identified above when using a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention (34 CFR § 300.309[a][2][i]); **or**

The child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, state-approved, grade-level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assess-

ments as required by 34 CFR §§ 300.304 & 300.305 (34 CFR § 300.309[a])[2][ii]).

3. The PPT determines that its findings noted above are not primarily the result of any of the following: a visual, hearing or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage; or limited English proficiency (34 CFR § 300.309[a][3]).
4. To ensure that underachievement in a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is not due to lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math, the PPT must consider, as part of the evaluation, data demonstrating that:
  - a. prior to, or as part of the referral process, the child was provided appropriate instruction in regular education settings, delivered by qualified personnel; and
  - b. data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction, which was provided to the child's parents (34 CFR § 300.309[b]).
5. A child must not be determined to be a child with a disability if the determinant factor for that determination is (34 CFR § 300.306[b][1]):
  - a. lack of appropriate instruction in reading, including the essential components of reading instruction as defined in section 1209(3) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (NCLB);
  - b. lack of appropriate instruction in math; or
  - c. limited English proficiency.

### **Federal Rationale for Changing Criteria for Determination of a Specific Learning Disability**

Improved outcomes for *all* students, those with and without disabilities, are the keystone of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). IDEA 2004 reflects this expectation for students with disabilities, by incorporating the specific language used in NCLB regarding the necessity for “professional development for teachers and other school staff to enable such personnel to deliver scientifically based academic and behavioral interventions, including scientifically based literacy instruction,” (34 CFR § 300.226[b][1]) and student assessment. The essential components of reading instruction are identified in NCLB as “explicit and systematic instruction in: phonemic awareness; phonics; vocabulary development; reading fluency, including oral reading skills; and reading comprehension strategies.” (20 USC 6368 §1208[c]) Furthermore, IDEA 2004 requires that each state adopt criteria for determining whether a student has a specific learning disability that:

- must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability;
- must permit the use of a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention; and
- may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures (34 CFR § 300.307).

## Connecticut Criteria for Determining if a Student Has a Specific Learning Disability and Is Eligible for Special Education

The Connecticut State Department of Education has adopted the following criteria consistent with 34 CFR § 300.309, to be used by all public agencies to determine whether a student has a specific learning disability:

- the child does not achieve adequately for the child's age or meet state-approved, grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age or state-approved, grade-level standards: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving;
- the child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or state-approved, grade-level standards in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem solving when using a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention;
- the child has been provided with explicit and systematic instruction in the essential components of scientific, research-based reading instruction or math from a qualified teacher, including documentation of regular assessments of achievement;
- the child's learning difficulties are not primarily the result of a visual, hearing or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; cultural factors; or environmental or economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency; and
- the disability must adversely affect the child's educational performance and, as a result, the child requires special education to address her or his unique educational needs.

**As of July 1, 2009, to identify a student with a specific learning disability, the Connecticut State Department of Education no longer permits the use of:**

- a severe discrepancy between educational performance and measured intellectual ability (IQ-achievement discrepancy), as previously required in Connecticut's 1999 *Guidelines for the Identification of Children with Learning Disabilities*.

**AND no longer requires:**

- a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes that impacts the areas of educational weakness, as previously required in Connecticut's 1999 *Guidelines for the Identification of Children with Learning Disabilities*.

### Brief Comparison of 1999 Criteria and 2009 Criteria

The primary changes in the criteria for identifying a student as a student with a specific learning disability involve adding the requirement to document a student's inadequate response to scientific research-based interventions and elimination of the requirements of a severe IQ-achievement discrepancy and documentation of a specific processing disorder. Although the addition of a specific criterion to document inadequate response to intervention is new, the requirement to rule out a lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math as the primary factor in the determination of a student being considered for special education is *not* new. This is a longstanding requirement of IDEA and also of the 1999 state guidelines. Moreover, Connecticut's special education regulations, Section 10-76d-7, state that alternative procedures and programs in regular education shall be explored and, where appropriate, implemented before a student is referred to a PPT.



In the 1999 state guidelines, the possibility of inappropriate instruction was addressed through the implementation of specific early intervening services, which were documented through reading and math worksheets (see Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999, Appendix C). In the 2010 guidelines, this requirement is addressed through documentation of inadequate response to intervention (RTI). Worksheets to verify that a student has received appropriate instruction in written expression, as well as reading and math, are included in the 2010 guidelines (Appendix B).

In Connecticut, the RTI process is termed scientific research-based interventions (SRBI). A comprehensive description of Connecticut's SRBI model is presented in *Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for all Students, Connecticut's Framework for RTI* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c). Early intervening services and RTI/SRBI share some similar goals, specifically, ensuring that students are not inappropriately identified as having a specific learning disability when the true problem is inappropriate instruction. However, there are also some important differences between early intervening services and SRBI. In particular, the SRBI framework is a much more comprehensive process than implementation of early intervening services, requiring a systemic (districtwide or at least schoolwide) effort and close collaboration between general and special education.

### **Further Information on Determining Inadequate Response to Intervention Through SRBI**

An SRBI process documents that appropriate instruction has been provided for all students and that alternative procedures and programs in general education (i.e., early intervening services) have been explored and, where appropriate, implemented for any student being considered for special education. As noted previously, SRBI emphasizes the use of effective core general education practices across all academic domains, as well as social-emotional learning and behavior, informed by data from universal screening and progress monitoring of the entire student population. SRBI encompasses multitiered interventions provided through general education, with increasing levels of intensity—for example, through more intervention time each week (e.g., daily rather than two to three times per week for a half hour), a smaller teacher-student ratio (e.g., one to three students rather than four to five students in a group), and more frequent monitoring of progress (e.g., three times per week rather than once a week)—across tiers. (See additional description of SRBI and the three-tiered intervention model in this document in the chapter on “Increasing Capacity,” as well as in Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c.) When core general education practices are effective for most students in a school, and appropriate research-based interventions have been implemented with fidelity (i.e., delivered in the manner in which they were designed and intended to be used), data from SRBI can document that appropriate instruction was provided to a student being considered for eligibility as a student with a learning disability for special education services, as required by IDEA 2004 and that her or his learning difficulty is not due to a lack of appropriate instruction.

Interventions in the SRBI process are relatively short term, typically eight to 20 weeks in duration per tier of intervention. However, the following points must be emphasized: 1) interventions may be provided in a shorter time span when implemented as part of a comprehensive evaluation; 2) within the eight- to 20-week intervention period, a student's progress should be monitored frequently; and 3) improvements to the intervention should be made during the intervention period if progress monitoring data suggest that the intervention is not working. These guidelines are based on evidence that a minimum of three data points are needed for baseline and an additional three data points to determine if there is any trend in the outcomes (Brown-Chidsey and Steege, 2005). It is critical that an intervention be implemented long enough for

change in student performance to be possible. Student responses to intervention should be monitored carefully and frequently throughout the intervention period, so that an ineffective intervention is changed or instruction is intensified promptly. For a student's response to intervention to be deemed "inadequate," her or his level of performance must be low relative to age-appropriate, grade-level expectations, and her or his rate of progress during intervention also must be insufficient, even after repeated attempts to change or otherwise intensify the intervention. In such a case, a referral for a special education evaluation on the basis of a specific learning disability should be considered.

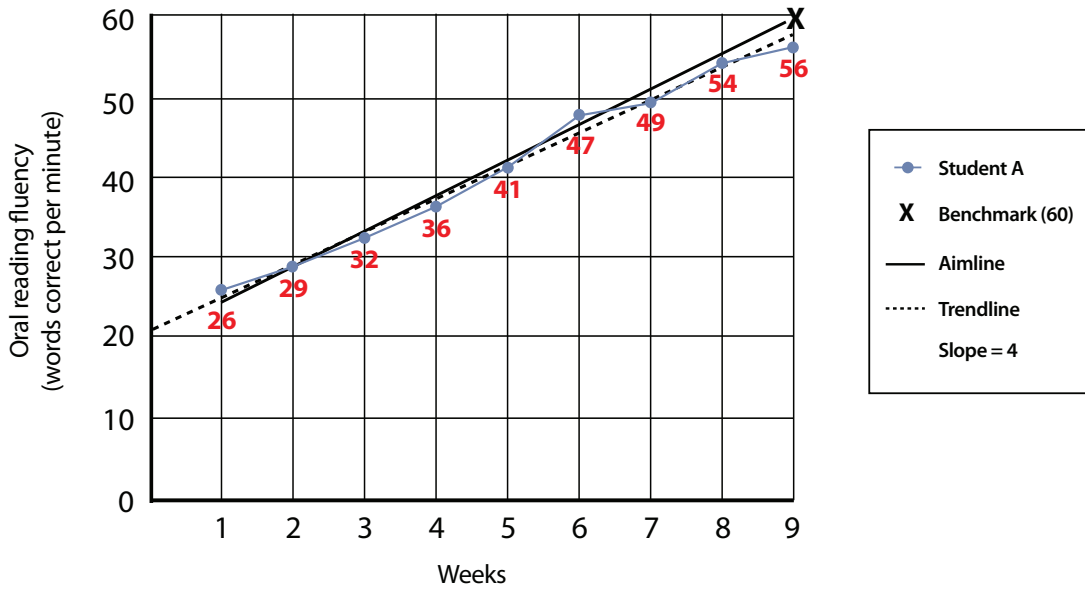
These criteria for identifying a specific learning disability sometimes are termed a "dual discrepancy" (Fuchs, Fuchs, McMaster and Al Otaiba, 2003). That is, the student must be discrepant from expectations in two ways: level of performance compared to grade or age peers, and rate of growth with more intensive interventions. It bears emphasizing that this "dual discrepancy" is entirely different from a severe IQ-achievement discrepancy, one of the requirements being eliminated in the current guidelines.

Figure 2 on page 33 provides an example of a student responding adequately to a reading intervention (Student A) and Figure 3 on page 33 is an example of a student with an inadequate response to a reading intervention (Student B). Both figures also demonstrate appropriate data collection meeting the requirements of 34 CFR 300.311(a)(7), showing the child's response to scientific-research based intervention as part of a comprehensive special education evaluation.

In both figures, prior to intervention, universal screening was conducted using an oral reading fluency curriculum based measure. This kind of screening measure is highly appropriate for students with reading difficulties that include inaccurate or dysfluent decoding. Oral reading fluency is also used appropriately as a progress monitoring measure for students whose reading difficulties include problems with accuracy or fluency of decoding. The established benchmark for both students is 60 words correct per minute (WCPM), appropriate for a student in the fall of second grade (Hasbrouck and Tindal, 2006). The aimline indicates the progress the student would have to make to achieve the established benchmark, that is, to catch up with her or his peers.

Figure 2 highlights a student responding adequately to a reading intervention. Student A's initial score of 26 WCPM is well below the established benchmark. Though identified through universal screening as well below the benchmark, after nine weeks of intervention and progress monitoring using an oral reading fluency curriculum-based measure, Student A made adequate progress. With an initial score of 26 and an ending score of 56, these data indicate a good response to the intervention. The dotted trend line and slope calculations in Figure 2 confirm that the student is on a trajectory to catch up to the established benchmark (i.e., 60 words correct words per minute). Using the Tukey method to calculate the student's rate of progress, as shown by the slope, Student A is averaging four words read correctly per minute (slope = 4 WCPM). If the intervention continues in the same manner, the current rate of progress will likely be maintained and Student A should reach the targeted benchmark within the next week ( $56 \text{ WCPM} + 4 \text{ WCPM} = 60 \text{ WCPM}$ ). In this example, a dual discrepancy does not exist because Student A is responding adequately to the intervention, will reach the targeted benchmark within the designated timeframe, and thus will not demonstrate a gap between his or her present level of performance and where he or she should be performing.

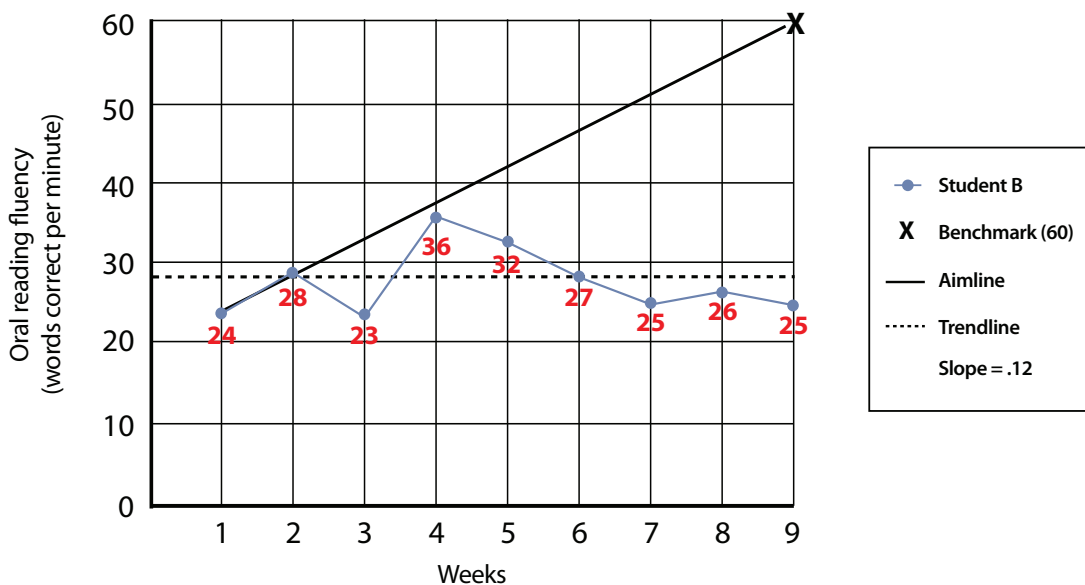
Figure 3 provides an example of a student who is not responding to a reading intervention. Initially, on the universal screening measure, the student averaged approximately 24 WCPM. During intervention, the student's nine progress monitoring assessments, ranging from a low of 24 WCPM to a high of 36 WCPM, show that the student is performing at a level below her or his peers (first discrepancy). The slope of the dotted trend line for this student's performance during intervention is flat (slope = .12 WCPM), indicating that her or his rate of learning (second discrepancy) is not sufficient to close the gap between the current level and the expected



**FIGURE 2.** Progress monitoring data from child responding to a reading intervention

level (peer comparison.) Based on the pattern of the progress monitoring data, the intervention should be changed or intensified. Assuming interventions were implemented with fidelity, if this student’s pattern of flat or minimal progress continues despite changes in or intensification of the intervention, then he or she is dually discrepant from peers, both with regard to level of performance and rate of growth during intervention and a referral for a special education evaluation might be warranted.

Contrast Figure 3 with Figure 2. Student B in Figure 3 is in the same grade and needs to meet the same benchmark (60 WCPM) as Student A in Figure 2; however, Student B, unlike the first student, is not showing a good response to the reading intervention. The student in Figure 2 does not meet the “dual discrepancy” consideration because her or his rate of growth as a result of intervention is adequate and places him or her on a trajectory to meet the established benchmark. The student is averaging 4 WCPM per week, indicated by the slope. However, the student in



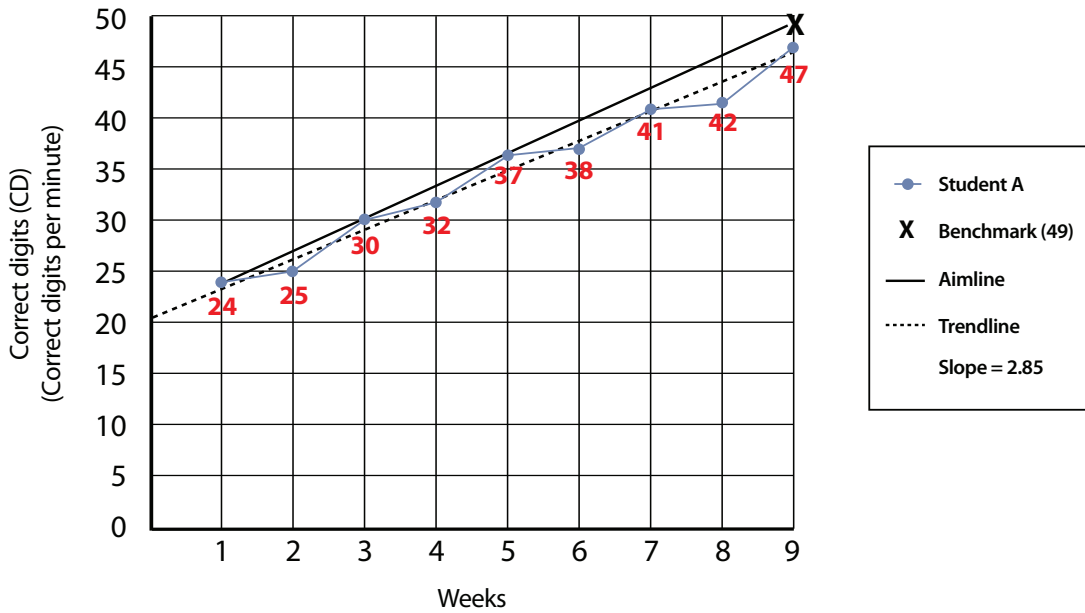
**FIGURE 3.** Progress monitoring data from child NOT responding to a reading intervention

Figure 3 does meet the “dual discrepancy” consideration. This student is below the expected level for her or his grade (first discrepancy) and her or his rate of growth does not place him or her on a trajectory to meet the established benchmark (second discrepancy). The slope of .12 identifies that the student is averaging only .12 WCPM per week.

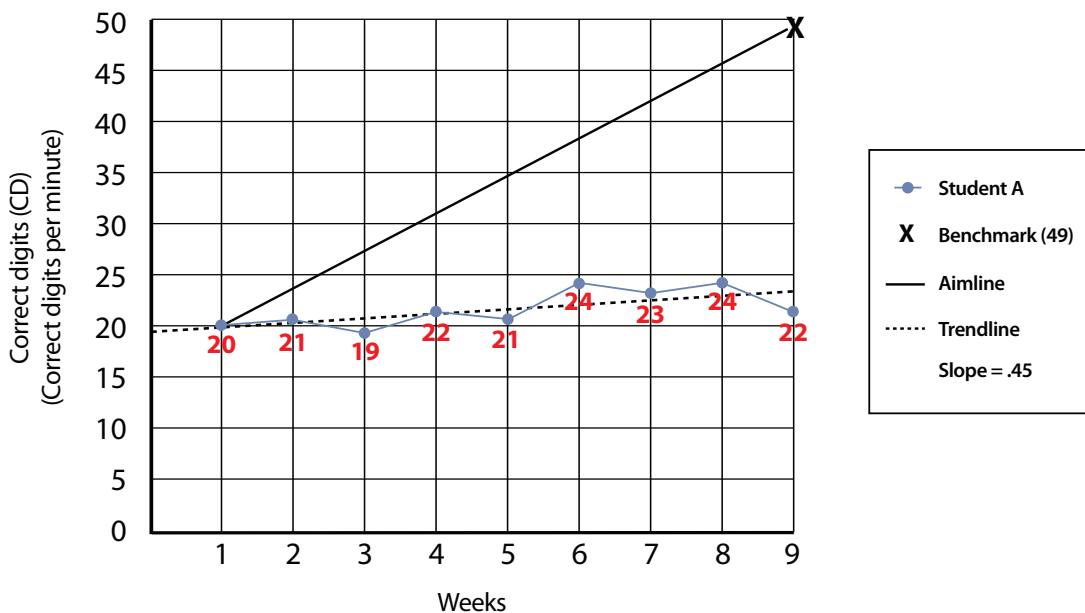
Figures 4 and 5 on page 35 show two other student responses to intervention in mathematics. Here the progress monitoring measure is a curriculum-based assessment in math that measures the number of correct digits (CD) per two minutes, administered under brief timed conditions that involve a sampling of items from the math curriculum. This math measure was also used for universal screening. The established benchmark goal, 49 CD per two minutes, is marked with the “X.” This benchmark represents an established benchmark for a student in fifth grade. The student shown in Figure 4 is making adequate progress because the trend line indicates that the student is on a trajectory to catch up to the math benchmark. Since the slope is 2.85 CD per two minutes, if intervention continues in the same manner, Student A should reach the targeted benchmark within the next week ( $47 \text{ CD} + 2.85 \text{ CD} = 49.85 \text{ CD}$ ). Like the student shown in Figure 2, the student in Figure 4 does not meet the “dual discrepancy” consideration. However, the student in Figure 5 shows inadequate progress. The trend line indicates minimal growth, with little closing of the gap between the student’s performance and the established benchmark. This student is not on a trajectory to catch up within a reasonable amount of time. If changes in the intervention and intensification of the intervention fail to accelerate progress, this Student B, like the one depicted in Figure 3, would be dually discrepant from peers with regard to both level of performance and rate of growth criteria.

Both a student’s performance level and growth rate must be considered in determining whether a student has demonstrated an adequate response to intervention. For example, a student, such as the one shown in Figure 4, whose math calculation skills are below grade expectations but who is showing good response to a math intervention and is on a trajectory to catch up to grade-level peers in a few months, is showing adequate progress and therefore should not be identified with a math disability.

Though the computation of a trend line and its slope can be done manually, the figures in this document were created using the functions built into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to demonstrate the ease of these calculations. Educators may find these functions more useful than manually calculating trend line and slope. In general, the manual and computer-based processes will yield similar though not always identical results. Graphing of students’ scores on progress monitoring assessments over time (i.e., weeks of intervention) provides a general sense of the effectiveness of interventions and whether a particular student’s level of progress warrants a change to an intervention. The specificity of trend line and slope calculations will more accurately identify the trajectory of a student’s learning rate and how quickly he or she will meet an established benchmark. More information about how to determine whether progress is adequate during the course of an intervention is provided in *Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for all Students, Connecticut’s Framework for RTI* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), as well as on the Web sites of the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring and the National Center on Response to Intervention. This is appropriate data collection meeting the requirements of 34 CFR 300.311(a)(7), showing the student’s response to scientific research-based intervention as part of a comprehensive special education evaluation.



**FIGURE 4.** Progress monitoring data from child responding to a math intervention



**FIGURE 5.** Progress monitoring data from child NOT responding to a math intervention

### A Note About Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses

As listed above in the section on federal requirements, IDEA 2004 mentions “a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, state-approved, grade-level standards, or intellectual development” as a possible criterion for identification of specific learning disabilities. The 2009 State of Connecticut criteria as identified in the *Executive Summary* (2009) do not require documentation of a pattern of strengths and weaknesses for the student to be identified with a specific learning disability. However, this type of pattern has been viewed historically as a hallmark of specific learning disabilities (Hallahan and Mock, 2003). For example, a student with dyslexia, a specific learning disability in reading, usually will evidence at least age-appropriate oral language abilities, and often grade-appropriate performance in

mathematics, coupled with substantial weaknesses in phonological abilities, word decoding and spelling (Stanovich, 2000). Although PPTs may observe this kind of uneven pattern in many students with specific learning disabilities, individuals with severe learning disabilities can show a relatively flat profile because of the interdependence of many abilities (Fletcher et al., 2007). For instance, a student with severe dyslexia may show substantial weaknesses across all academic domains, including mathematics, because he or she cannot read math problems, the math textbook, directions, etc.

### **Required Documentation: Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report and Worksheets**

**Description of forms.** At the end of the evaluation process, the team must complete a Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report form (ED 629L or 629P) to document whether a student is eligible for special education and related services due to a specific learning disability. The Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report form summarizes the required components of an evaluation as well as the criteria for eligibility. To be identified with a specific learning disability, a student must meet all the eligibility criteria listed under Section II on the report form. Please see Appendix A for this form, which, for ease of use, is provided in two formats, portrait and landscape. In addition, it is expected that a “rule-out” for lack of appropriate instruction in the areas of concern will include evidence of exposure to appropriate scientific research-based instruction and intervention. Required documentation for appropriate instruction and intervention must be provided using the Reading (ED 630), Mathematics (ED 631), and/or Written Expression (ED 637) Worksheets, which can be found in Appendix B. All worksheets relevant to the student’s domains of difficulty (reading, math and/or written expression) must be completed.

**Instructions for completing forms.** The Reading, Mathematics and Written Expression Worksheets summarize a process that involves input from multiple professionals and that would usually be accomplished prior to a student’s referral for a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services as a student with a specific learning disability. These worksheets could be used to document instruction and interventions provided to any student who is having difficulty with learning and is likely to be referred to the school’s intervention, teacher assistance or data team. In fact the Reading, Mathematics, and Written Expression Worksheets may be used by any district to collect general SRBI data for all students by removing the text at the top of the page that indicates it is for students with learning disabilities as well as the ED form number that is located in the footer on each page and replacing that information with the name of the district that is modifying the form for internal use. However, these state-designed worksheets (Ed 630, 631, & 636) are required to be used for a student who is suspected of having a specific learning disability to document that her or his difficulty is not due to a lack of appropriate instruction. Decisions regarding the use and completion of these worksheets would be intimately connected to these intervention, teacher assistance or data teams and the process used to provide assistance to students who are struggling academically. The Reading, Mathematics and Written Expression Worksheets also provide documentation that meets the requirements of 34 CFR 300.311(a)(7) regarding student centered data collected to show the child’s response to scientific research-based intervention. The student’s general education classroom teacher would provide information and documentation for Tier I (steps 1, 2 and 3 on the worksheets). The interventionist, that is, the individual who delivered a particular Tier II or III intervention, would provide information and documentation for the targeted interventions (steps 4 and 5 on the worksheets). An interventionist could be a general education classroom teacher, especially for Tier II, or a specialist, such as a reading specialist, math specialist, speech-language

pathologist, or special educator. Often there may be more than one interventionist involved in the completion of a worksheet.

Step 1 on each worksheet requires a brief description of the core general education instruction, which should be scientific research-based and comprehensive in addressing important competencies, in the domain under consideration (reading, mathematics and/or written expression). In step 2, the classroom teacher should specify how he or she differentiated general education instruction to meet the needs of the student who has been referred. Differentiation of general education instruction to meet the needs of struggling students — for instance, via flexible small groups and alternative ways of presenting the same content — should be a routine part of Tier I practices. A teacher might provide a student who is struggling in the general education math curriculum during whole class instruction with small group math instruction in the student's area of difficulty and additional opportunities for practice. Step 3 requires documentation of the student's continuing difficulties, despite appropriate Tier I practices and differentiation of instruction, through Tier I progress monitoring assessments (i.e., common assessments).

Step 4 on each worksheet specifies a variety of supplemental scientific research-based interventions that should have been attempted, either targeted interventions at Tier II or more targeted and intensive interventions at Tier III, depending on the nature of the student's difficulties. These interventions should meet the requirements discussed in this document and summarized on the form (e.g., implemented with fidelity and by an appropriately qualified interventionist) and might include calculation or problem solving in mathematics; or decoding, fluency or comprehension in reading. Information regarding the frequency, duration, and type of intervention also should be listed on the form or attached, with appropriate Tier II/III progress monitoring data to document the student's response to each intervention delivered. For instance, a reading comprehension intervention involving research-based comprehension strategy instruction (type of intervention) might have been provided for half an hour, four days per week (frequency), for a period of eight weeks (duration), with a reading Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) involving a maze task used to monitor progress. Sometimes a student's difficulties may necessitate interventions in multiple areas. A student might have difficulties with calculation skills in mathematics but also have problem-solving difficulties that exceed what can be explained by her or his poor calculation skills (e.g., difficulty determining the information relevant to solving a problem). This student would require interventions in both calculation and problem solving.

Step 5 on each worksheet documents that a student has shown insufficient progress to meet age or state-approved, grade-level standards, despite attempts to improve, individualize and intensify interventions. Progress-monitoring data should be included in both graphic and numeric formats. An example of a graphic format is a line graph that shows a student's performance over time during an intervention, with time plotted on the x-axis and the student's scores plotted on the y-axis (see Figures 2-5). An example of a numeric format is a table of the student's numerical scores over time on the progress-monitoring assessments. Graphic formats are especially helpful for showing trends in a student's progress toward a goal or benchmark, but numeric data also are often necessary for accurate interpretation of a student's performance.

Like the worksheets, the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report form requires input from multiple professionals, as well as from parents. The PPT will complete this form. Section I of the form ensures that all the required components of an evaluation have been addressed, including input from parents, information about interventions and instructional strategies used prior to the referral, any educationally relevant medical findings, the required general education classroom observation in the student's area of difficulty, and assessment information. Some of this information, such as interventions and assessments used in connection with the SRBI process, can be obtained from the Reading, Mathematics and Written Expression Worksheets. Also, as discussed elsewhere in this document, throughout the SRBI and comprehensive evaluation processes, PPTs must be mindful of the influence of culture on student performance, as well as the need for

nonbiased assessment practices and decision making.

Section 2 of the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report form lists all the criteria the student must meet to be eligible for special education and related services due to having a specific learning disability. In addition, the PPT should provide statements of assurances in several key areas: the dates on which the parents were provided with data-based documentation of student progress; and the dates on which they were notified about state policies for performance, strategies for increasing the student's rate of learning, and the parent's right to request an evaluation (i.e., procedural safeguards). In addition, the PPT must assure that an IQ-achievement discrepancy was not used to determine eligibility, nor was a processing disorder required as part of the eligibility decision. Each PPT member must sign the form, either in the space indicating her or his agreement with the conclusions of the team, or in the space below it indicating her or his disagreement and providing a reason for that disagreement.



## 4 | Planning a Comprehensive Evaluation

IDEA 2004 contains provisions regarding evaluation procedures (34 CFR § 300.304). Among the procedures enumerated, the following are key issues to consider in planning a comprehensive evaluation to determine if a student is eligible for special education as a student with a learning disability.

### Nonbiased Assessment

Nonbiased assessment encompasses not only the selection of appropriately normed tests that have been validated for the specific purpose for which they have been designed, but also a broad range of assessment procedures, such as screening practices, early intervening services, test administration and test interpretation. *Nonbiased assessment is essential to more effectively determine the needs of students of diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnicities, as well as students who speak English as a second language.* Several important components of nonbiased assessment include assessing students in the language most likely to yield accurate results when feasible (e.g., for English language learners, usually their native language) and optimally using an evaluator who is proficient in the student's dominant language and who is appropriately trained in the area of multicultural assessment. It is essential to interpret assessment information in the context of a student's sociocultural and linguistic background (Donovan and Cross, 2002; Harry and Klingner, 2006), such as considering whether a student is likely to have had an opportunity to learn the content being tested or considering the cultural relevance to the student of what is being assessed. Information from parents and families is especially important in making these interpretations. Decision making and selection of assessments also should not be guided solely by a desire to have a student receive services. IDEA 2004 continues to mandate that no single procedure be used as the sole criterion for determining whether a student has a disability and that all areas of suspected disability be assessed. In selecting tests it is important to review the technical information available about the groups of students included in the normative sample to determine the degree to which the student's ethnic/racial group is represented.

Like other states, Connecticut is faced with the challenge of ensuring that students of color are not erroneously overrepresented in special education, while at the same time making certain that students of color with disabilities receive the services for which they are eligible. Donovan and Cross (2002) concluded that prevention, early identification, and early intervention (as described in Connecticut's *Framework for RTI*, Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c) are the most effective strategies to prevent overrepresentation of students of color in high incidence disability categories such as learning disabilities. Over-identification of students of color with disabilities can emanate not only from bias in the tests, but also from the attitudes and perceptions of the school personnel who make decisions about the students referred for testing. While attitudes may not always be overtly demonstrated, educators' beliefs and perceptions can, and do, influence interpretation and use of data in identifying students for special education. For example, Harry and Klingner (2006) present case studies of the interaction of cultures that demonstrate how the attitude of school personnel toward parents and students influenced placement and identification category as well as out-of-school suspension. Decisions made to provide students with perceived necessary services sometimes are influenced by "unconscious bias" (Losen and Orleid, 2002, p. xxii). Evaluators and PPT members are cautioned to examine the bias that could be introduced into the identification process by their attitudes and perceptions.

## Language Status

Language status refers to whether a student is an English language learner. English language learners are students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English. If a student is an English language learner, PPTs should be especially aware of two types of potential identification errors: 1) inappropriate identification of English language learners as having a specific learning disability and finding such students eligible for special education services, and 2) inappropriate exclusion of English language learners with a specific learning disability from special education services. The nonbiased assessment practices outlined previously can help to avoid the first type of error. In addition, the use of SRBI can increase the capacity of general education to meet the needs of students who are English language learners, and it appears to be as helpful with these students as with monolingual English students, at least in the area of reading (Gerber and Durgunoglu, 2004). PPTs should also recognize that English language learners first entering mainstream, English-speaking schools at the middle or high school level might have longstanding unidentified learning disabilities.

The CSDE Bureau of Data Collection, Research and Evaluation reported that growth in English language learners during the 2007-08 school year contributed to the increased diversity of Connecticut's student population with 1,608 students who were English language learners and were also identified as having a specific learning disability. Over the last three school years, the number of students with a specific learning disability who were also identified as English language learners increased precipitously (60.6 percent) at a time when the total number of students with a specific learning disability fell by 9.2 percent. As a result, the percentage of students with a specific learning disability who are eligible for language services more than doubled to 7.2 percent from 3.1 percent. Among all students with disabilities, students with a specific learning disability accounted for 44.1 percent of those students also identified as English language learners.

All English language learners should receive appropriate supports and differentiation of instruction as part of core (Tier I) general education practices. To provide effective Tier I instruction to this population, educators in Connecticut should understand the policies and procedures in place for English language learners, as well as different instructional models developed for these students. Effective Tier I practices for English language learners, as well as appropriate Tier II and III interventions for English language learners who need them, are essential in order to meet the requirement to rule out inadequate instruction when evaluating a student for a specific learning disability.

Relevant state policies and procedures include the Connecticut Position Statement on the Education of Students Acquiring English as a Second Language (adopted January 3, 2001); state statutory requirements for educating English language learners not served in required programs of bilingual education; and state statutory requirements for language transition support services. Further information on these policies is in Appendix D. Appendix E provides examples of instructional models developed to meet the needs of this population. See Connecticut's *Framework for RTI*, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c) for many useful print and electronic resources on effective instructional practices for English language learners.

## Behavior and Social-Emotional Functioning

Student behavior and social-emotional functioning interact strongly with their academic achievement. Students who are struggling academically may eventually develop an overlay of behavioral or social-emotional problems secondary to their learning difficulties, and those with behavioral or social-emotional problems may eventually develop academic difficulties. Classroom management practices can also influence a student's behavior and social-emotional functioning. In determining whether a student has a specific learning disability, the PPT must evaluate and consider class-

room management practices as well as the use of evidence-based instruction. A formal classroom observation, with documentation, in an area of the student’s learning difficulty — as required for eligibility determination of a specific learning disability — is one way to connect a student’s relevant behavior to her or his academic functioning (34 CFR § 300.310). In Connecticut’s Framework for RTI, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), as well as other RTI efforts, behavioral and social-emotional functioning are recognized as key areas to be addressed in the three-tiered model through effective core practices at Tier I and the provision of appropriate interventions at Tiers II and III. For additional suggestions for improving classroom management practices, please see the “Increasing Capacity” section of this document.

## Data to Document Appropriate Instruction

In planning a comprehensive evaluation, a critical consideration for PPTs involves the data used to document that a student has received appropriate instruction, including data from the SRBI/RTI process. To rule out that a student’s learning difficulties are not due to a lack of appropriate instruction for a student referred for a possible learning disability, data collection during the SRBI process, recorded on the appropriate worksheet (i.e., Reading, Mathematics, Written Expression) by general education personnel, is essential and must also be reported on the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report by the PPT. The quality of these data depends heavily upon the use of suitable assessments at all three tiers of the SRBI framework. For instance, the use of inappropriate universal screenings at Tier I can compromise the entire SRBI process. Opportunities for early intervening services with some students may be missed, other students may be incorrectly identified as needing intervention, and valuable time and limited resources may be wasted. In the primary grades, for example, most struggling readers have problems in word decoding (phonics skills), either alone or in combination with comprehension difficulties. Furthermore, decoding weaknesses remain a relatively common source of reading problems even in older students (Catts et al., 2005; Leach et al., 2003). Two types of screening measures are especially useful for detecting these kinds of reading difficulties (Fletcher et al., 2007; Riedel, 2007): measures of out-of-context word decoding, especially measures that include nonsense words (i.e., words a student cannot recognize “by sight”) and oral reading fluency measures that assess how many words per minute a student can read correctly in grade-appropriate text. Without these kinds of measures, universal screenings will miss many struggling readers.

Likewise, in the provision of interventions at Tiers II and III, as well as in the delivery of special education services, appropriate progress-monitoring tools are like the navigation instruments used by pilots, as noted by Wright (2007). Implementing an intervention without progress-monitoring data is like trying to fly a plane at night or in a storm by vision alone: an invitation to failure, if not disaster. In addition to being nonbiased, assessments used during the SRBI process should be technically adequate (e.g., reliable and valid), as well as appropriate to their intended use. Reliability means that a test is reasonably accurate and consistent; validity refers to whether a test actually measures what it is believed to measure. Intended use refers to the purpose for which a measure is designed and administered: screening, progress monitoring or diagnostic assessment, as discussed further below.

**Important features of appropriate progress-monitoring measures.** Progress monitoring is an important component in the comprehensive system of data collection that is integral to the success of an SRBI/RTI framework. The reliability and validity of this system is especially critical during the process of a comprehensive evaluation for the identification of a specific learning disability. Assessment tools used in progress monitoring should have certain characteristics to ensure sufficient measurement of student progress (see Table 1 below). In addition, they should be sensi-

tive indicators of a specific academic task or a learning objective and be relatively brief and easy for educators to administer or they will drain an inordinate amount of instructional time.

Because progress-monitoring assessments are given relatively frequently (e.g., every one to two weeks), they require multiple equivalent forms — that is, forms with equivalent overall levels of difficulty but different items. Moreover, the assessments should be sensitive to small changes in student learning and should correctly target the student's specific weakness, the one addressed in the intervention. For example, if a student's primary difficulty in mathematics involves calculation skills, but the progress-monitoring assessment emphasizes problem solving, then the assessment will not be accurate in measuring the student's response to the intervention and the data will not be useful.

Also, assessment tools should be consistent across all measurement occasions. For instance, progress monitoring for reading fluency should employ passages at one consistent grade level, because changing the grade level of the passages will make it difficult to interpret a student's performance. If a student's trendline stays flat under conditions where the grade level of the passages increased, is that because the student is failing to make progress or because the passages increased in difficulty? Similarly, if a writing prompt is used to monitor progress in written expression, consistent measurement conditions should be employed. For example, the amount of time to respond to the prompt, the general type of prompt (e.g., prompts involving narrative vs. expository writing), and the mode of transcription (e.g., handwriting vs. keyboarding) should be consistent over time, otherwise interpretation of the student's performance will be confounded with changes in measurement conditions. The use of consistent assessment tools for measurement purposes should be distinguished from decisions about materials to be used in day-to-day instruction. Maintaining a consistent grade level of passages to monitor a student's reading progress does not mean teachers must keep the student in the same grade level of text for daily reading instruction if the student's instructional reading level improves. Likewise, despite using consistent measurement conditions to monitor writing progress, teachers should provide instruction on various types of writing.

Most authorities on RTI (Fletcher et al., 2007; Fuchs, 2004; Hosp, Hosp and Howell, 2007; McCook, 2006) recommend the use of curriculum-based measurement (CBM) for progress monitoring. The extensive research base behind CBMs identifies this measurement system as a valid and reliable way to measure overall competence in a given area. CBM involves short, timed measures that correlate well with students' overall competence in a particular domain, such as timed oral reading of a grade-appropriate passage for reading comprehension at the elementary level or timed completion of a set of grade-appropriate math items for overall mathematics achievement. Originally, CBM evolved from local curriculums, but currently a number of generic, published CBM assessments are available. These generic CBMs work just as well as locally developed CBMs (Brown-Chidsey and Steege, 2005) and have many practical advantages for schools. For instance, they provide multiple equivalent forms and detailed data on technical adequacy, as well as research-based norms that can be used to make decisions regarding individual students' risk status and rate of progress. Additional information on this topic is available at the Web sites of the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring and the National Center on Response to Intervention, which includes an excellent review of published progress monitoring assessments that is due to be updated in the fall of 2010.

**TABLE 1.** Criteria for Selecting Appropriate Progress Monitoring Assessment Tools

Foundational Psychometric Standards	1. Reliability
	2. Validity
Progress Monitoring Standards	3. Sufficient number of alternative forms
	4. Sensitivity to learning
	5. Evidence of instructional utility
	6. Specification of adequate growth
	7. Description of benchmarks for adequate end-of-year performance or goal-setting process

*Note: Criteria taken from the National Center for Progress Monitoring*

**Responsibilities of the PPT.** To determine the accuracy of the SRBI/RTI data for use in documenting a student’s response to appropriate instruction, it is incumbent upon the PPT to consider whether the assessment tools used in progress monitoring meet the requirements outlined above. School personnel might want to consider using a device for evaluating progress monitoring tools that is available to download and should be considered when selecting tools that are not currently endorsed as meeting standards for progress monitoring. As expanded from Wright (2007), common assessment sources in schools that might be appropriate for in use in progress monitoring include:

- curriculum-based measurement (CBM);
- class and homework grades;
- CALI common formative assessments;
- permanent (work) products;
- office discipline referrals;
- attendance records;
- systematic direct observations; and
- direct behavior ratings.

Whichever assessment methods are chosen for use in progress monitoring, it is essential that they are implemented as a scientifically based practice, particularly when data obtained from progress monitoring are used to make high stakes decisions such as the determination of eligibility for special education for a student with a specific learning disability. Furthermore, care should be taken to ensure that a sufficient number of the assessment sources used in progress monitoring are objective (e.g., CBM, attendance records) rather than subjective (e.g., grades, observations, behavior ratings). For example, permanent work products might be a valuable progress-monitoring tool when designing or evaluating an individual intervention to increase the amount of math work completed and the percentage of work completed correctly. However, this data source alone would not provide sufficient evidence to document that a student’s learning difficulty was not due to a lack of appropriate instruction, a necessary criteria for the possible determination of a specific learning disability. PPTs should examine these data as part of the comprehensive evaluation that is necessary to make an eligibility decision of specific learning disability. Also, see further discussion of issues in evaluating progress-monitoring tools below, in the section on “Considerations in Different Academic Domains.”

**The role of diagnostic assessment.** CBMs and most other progress-monitoring tools are intended to serve as quick indicators of a student’s overall competence in a domain, not as a detailed diagnostic assessment in that domain. If a student’s performance on an appropriate progress-monitoring assessment meets expectations for her or his grade, and if there are no other reasons to be concerned about the student’s performance, then diagnostic assessment is unnecessary. However, if the student’s performance in progress monitoring raises concerns, or if there are concerns on the part of teachers or families despite the fact that a student meets the benchmark on the progress-monitoring assessment, then further diagnostic assessment may be warranted. Diagnostic assessment, a more time-consuming process than progress-monitoring assessment that is completed when needed as part of general education assessment, involves measures that attempt to pinpoint a student’s specific strengths and weaknesses in a given domain. As defined in Connecticut’s *Framework for RTI*, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), diagnostic assessments are “additional assessments used both by general educators and specialists to clarify and target the needs of individual students when the information provided by other types of assessments, such as universal common assessments [screenings], is not sufficient or too broad” (pg. 64) and *are not to be confused with assessments that might be administered specifically during a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for special education*. Such diagnostic assessments might be used in general education, throughout all three tiers of instruction and intervention and data from these assessments could also be incorporated into a comprehensive evaluation. For example, for an eighth-grader experiencing difficulty with written expression, general educators might administer diagnostic assessments of areas such as handwriting; spelling; capitalization; punctuation; vocabulary; sentence structure; organization of content; and use of planning, revision and editing processes. Information from the diagnostic assessments could then be used to target intervention appropriately. Progress-monitoring assessments such as CBM measures do not eliminate the need for detailed diagnostic assessment of some students; rather, they permit more selective, efficient use of diagnostic assessments with the subset of students who require them.

In planning a comprehensive evaluation, PPTs certainly should consider data from existing general education diagnostic assessments, which can contribute valuable, detailed information. Additional diagnostic assessments may also be necessary for some students undergoing a comprehensive evaluation. Furthermore, a PPT may determine that a trial diagnostic placement as an evaluative measure (i.e., structured placement of not more than eight weeks’ duration) is appropriate to assess the needs of a student for whom an IEP may be needed but for whom the evaluation is either inconclusive or the data insufficient to develop the student’s IEP (Connecticut Regulations § 10-76d-14(b)). Signed written permission to conduct a diagnostic placement as an evaluative measure should be obtained from the parent by completing the “Notice and Consent to Conduct an Initial Evaluation” form (ED 625).

## Using Appropriate Types of Test Scores

Standardized norm-referenced tests often provide many different types of scores. Examiners must employ appropriate types of scores when interpreting norm-referenced test results as part of a comprehensive evaluation. Most authorities on testing, as well as professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), caution against the use of age-equivalent or grade-equivalent measures and recommend either percentile ranks or standard scores (Salvia and Ysseldyke, 2004). However, the latter types of scores often require some explanation for families to understand them. For example, without explanation of the fact that, for a particular test, the average range for standard scores is 90-110, families may not understand that a student who obtained a standard score of 75 scored substantially below average. Examiners also must be mindful of the norms used to calculate percentile

ranks and standard scores, which can be based on either age or grade. If a student is older or younger than typical for her or his grade, then scores may vary substantially depending on which types of norms are used. A student who has been retained will obtain higher scores with the use of grade norms than age norms; a child born in January who entered school early, as the youngest in her or his grade, will obtain higher scores with the use of age norms than grade norms.

A student's test scores should be interpreted in relation to information about the norms used as well as the student's overall patterns of performance on other measures. For example, consider a student with a history of retention, who scores within the average range on a measure of reading comprehension when grade norms are used, but who scores below average on the same test when age norms are used, and who also has substantial difficulty with everyday classroom tasks involving reading comprehension. This pattern suggests that the student does have substantial problems in reading comprehension that should not be discounted based on the average grade-normed test score. See further discussion below, in the section on "Special Considerations," under "Grade Retention and Late School Entrance."

### **The Option to Administer IQ Tests**

Under these 2010 guidelines, PPTs can no longer require a discrepancy between measured intellectual ability and educational performance as one of the criteria for determining whether a student has a specific learning disability. Thus, routine administration of IQ tests to every student being evaluated for a specific learning disability is not required. However, PPTs still may choose to administer IQ tests in situations where information from such tests would be helpful. IDEA 2004 provides for the option to assess the relative contribution of cognitive factors in the determination of eligibility for special education services for students with a disability (34 CFR § 300.304[b](3)). Such situations might include ruling out intellectual disability (ID) if a student manifests broad developmental delays involving adaptive functioning (e.g., social competence or self-help skills), or identifying intellectual giftedness in a student with a specific learning disability, as discussed further in the section on "Students with High Ability (Intellectual Giftedness)." IQ tests also may be useful for assessing specific types of abilities, including nonverbal areas such as spatial abilities, and for helping team members better understand an individual student's strengths and weaknesses.

### **The Option to Administer Processing Measures**

While documentation of a processing disorder is no longer required to identify a specific learning disability, PPTs may consider a student's performance on processing measures as needed. For example, if a student appears to have a learning disability in reading, measures of phonological processing may help to provide information about her or his overall strengths and weaknesses in the oral language abilities that are foundational for reading, when given as part of a broader evaluation that also includes other measures of language and reading. In addition, measures of working memory may sometimes be useful, because students with a comprehension component to their reading difficulties often have problems with working memory (Nation, 2005). As another example, measures of executive function or fine motor skill may be helpful as part of a broader evaluation of a student who has difficulties with written expression (Hooper, Swartz, Wakely, deDruiif and Montgomery, 2002). Teams should take care to use technically adequate processing measures that are relevant to the student's domain of difficulty (e.g., reading, math or written expression), and to interpret those measures in the context of other information, such as information about appropriate instructional strategies and response to intervention. It is important that the information collected be useful in planning appropriate instruction and programming for the student.

## 5 | Other Considerations in Determining Eligibility

The following are areas that Planning and Placement Teams should consider routinely during the process of a comprehensive evaluation to determine if a specific learning disability exists and if the student may be eligible for special education services due to the specific learning disability.

### **Influences of Culture, Race and Languages other than English**

Culture may be defined in many ways; however, the most simple, yet precise definition might be “a way of life.” Although cultural groups may share many of the same experiences, habits and preferences, multiple ecological factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, family dynamics, religious values) create individual differences that must be acknowledged to effectively understand and engage students from different cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds in the learning process. Culture remains a salient factor affecting most every aspect of a student’s life, and its overarching impact on self-image, perception by others, behavior and academic performance should not be discounted or minimized.

Nonbiased assessment is central to the appropriate identification of students with specific learning disabilities, particularly when assessing students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from those of the dominant culture. Students bring with them their own cognitive styles and, although they present with individual differences, research also indicates some similarities within a single cultural group with regard to behavioral patterns, socialization and cognitive styles (Frisby, 2005). Reliance solely on traditional assessment measures and practices may preclude the accurate assessment of students from underrepresented groups. The inclusion of alternate techniques, such as SRBI, prior to or as part of the process for determining eligibility for special education is essential for gathering accurate data for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The failure of a student from a cultural, racial or linguistic minority group to progress sufficiently in interventions that are effective for most other students, including other students from similar backgrounds, could suggest a specific learning disability, assuming the student meets the criteria outlined in this document (pgs. 40-41). PPTs should also consider a student’s developmental and family histories. Students with specific learning disabilities sometimes have a history of early language impairment or close family members with similar academic difficulties (Fletcher et al., 2007). The presence of these types of patterns, in conjunction with other evidence, may provide additional support in the appropriate identification of a specific learning disability.

If a student is an English language learner, it should not be automatically assumed that her or his difficulties are due solely to limited experience with English, because some English language learners do have a specific learning disability. To aid in accurate identification of a specific learning disability in English language learners, comparing the student’s performance in her or his dominant language with her or his performance in English is important (Genesee, Paradis and Crago, 2004), as is information about prior instructional and educational history. English language learners with specific learning disabilities generally manifest similar problems in their dominant language as in English. For example, a Spanish-speaking student with a reading disability will usually show similar linguistic difficulties, such as poor phonemic awareness and word decoding, in Spanish as well as in English.

An English language learner also may have speech-language disabilities; again, these disabilities would generally manifest in the dominant language as well as in English. If there is a question



of speech-language disabilities in an English language learner, for example, as indicated by parental information about the student's dominant language development, then a speech-language assessment may be warranted. Updated guidance about identification issues for English language learners who exhibit difficulty with communication skills may be found in the CSDE's *Guidelines for Speech and Language Programs* (2008b). Conversely, if a student has progressed normally in language development in the dominant language, or has progressed well in academic learning with dominant language instruction, then identifying the student with a learning or speech-language disability would not be appropriate. In making these determinations, information from the SRBI process is essential and may call for the involvement of a speech-language pathologist.

## Behavioral and Social-Emotional Influences

In comprehensive evaluations for a specific learning disability, when a student demonstrates behavioral or social-emotional difficulties as well as linguistic or academic difficulties, the PPT must decide where the student's *primary* difficulty lies. If the primary difficulty is determined to be a disability involving language or academic learning, then the student may be identified as having a specific learning disability, assuming he or she meets the other relevant criteria listed in this document (i.e., inadequate progress during SRBI and exclusionary criteria). If the primary difficulty is determined to involve behavior or social-emotional functioning, the student should not be identified with a specific learning disability, although the student's behavioral or social-emotional needs should be addressed through tiered interventions or special education in another disability area if the student is eligible. However, determination of a primary disability does not mean that a student's other disabilities will not also be addressed through special education and/or related services. Regardless of the primary disability determination for identification purposes, all areas of suspected disability must be assessed and addressed. In making these kinds of decisions, information about a student's prior history, including her or his progress in academic, behavioral or social-emotional interventions during the SRBI process, is essential.

## Influence of Economic or Environmental Disadvantage

When a student evaluated for a specific learning disability comes from a background of economic or environmental disadvantage, PPTs must decide if the primary concern is the economic or environmental disadvantage or a learning problem intrinsic to the student. As in the case of English language learners, PPTs should not automatically assume that the student's difficulties are due to economic or environmental disadvantage. However, PPTs must not identify a student with a specific learning disability if they decide that her or his academic difficulties are due primarily to a factor other than an intrinsic learning difficulty. Examples of ways that economic or environmental disadvantage may affect students' academic achievement include limited exposure to literacy at home, limited exposure to academic language and vocabulary, frequent absence from school, fragmented school experiences due to high mobility, or lack of other experiences that influence school learning. These problems certainly require attention, but they should be dealt with through high-quality general education practices and tiered interventions within an SRBI framework. Schools serving populations with a high proportion of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds should be especially careful to ensure that their curriculums address the specific needs of these students. For example, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may need a relatively heavier core emphasis on vocabulary enrichment than students from other economic backgrounds (Biemiller, 1999).

## Other Disabilities

Although a specific learning disability may certainly occur concomitantly with other disabilities, a student should be identified as having a specific learning disability only when the learning disability is the student's primary problem. A student who exhibits indications of other disabilities, such as an intellectual disability, severe emotional disturbance, sensory impairment, motor disability, or autism spectrum disorder, should be evaluated for those disabilities. If the student meets the eligibility criteria for more than one disability, the PPT must decide which disability is primary.

In making this decision, the PPT should consider how a student is functioning with respect to the general education curriculum and determine how the disabilities are influencing the student's ability to participate and progress in the general curriculum. Whichever disability is affecting the student's achievement the most would be the primary disability. If medical conditions such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI) are present, the PPT needs to consider the influence of these conditions on the student's learning problems. For example, a student may be identified as having a medical condition such as ADHD, which is not considered a separate "disability condition" under IDEA 2004 (Connecticut ADHD Task Force, 2005). However, if the disorder adversely affects a student's educational performance, eligibility for special education services under existing categories, such as specific learning disability (LD), emotional disturbance (ED), or other health impaired (OHI), should be considered.

## Adequacy of Assessments

Besides selecting technically adequate, nonbiased, appropriate assessments for use in comprehensive evaluations, Planning and Placement Teams should consider the adequacy of assessments that were administered to collect data used to document a student's response to intervention, as described in the previous section on "Data to Document Appropriate Instruction." Technically adequate assessments appropriately targeted to a student's individual needs are essential for the SRBI/RTI process to work as intended. PPTs should also consider that the adequacy of assessments available for progress monitoring differs across academic domains, with generally better assessments available for basic reading skills, reading fluency and elementary mathematics, than for reading comprehension, written expression, and advanced mathematics although new tools are being developed on a regular basis. (See further detail in "Considerations in Different Academic Domains" and "Issues in Identification at the Middle and Secondary Levels.") Educators should use the best assessments possible for a student's particular domains of difficulty.

If members of the PPT believe the technical adequacy or appropriateness of assessments used during the SRBI/RTI process is questionable, they should take this into account when reviewing such data in a comprehensive evaluation, notify educators involved in the SRBI /RTI process of their concerns, and suggest more appropriate assessments to be administered now and in the future. For the student being evaluated, additional SRBI/RTI assessments may be given where doing so would not unduly delay the evaluation process. The PPT should view inadequate assessments as a problem to be addressed within the general education system and should be cautious about the interpretation of any resulting data. Data obtained from assessments that are inadequate to measure a student's progress on instruction or an intervention may not be sufficient to rule out "lack of appropriate instruction," a criterion for students to meet the eligibility requirements for a specific learning disability. Accurate data documenting a student's response to appropriate instruction are critical in the eligibility determination for a specific learning disability. With respect to the eligibility process for students suspected of having a specific learning disability in reading, mathematics, and/or written expression, the relevant worksheets from Appendix

B must be used to document that a student has received appropriate instruction in the areas of difficulty.

### Adequacy of Interventions and Fidelity of Implementation

When using data from an SRBI process as part of a comprehensive evaluation, the PPT should consider all of the following: the overall efficacy of Tier I practices for most students in a school or district, whether supplemental interventions used at Tiers II and III were research-based and appropriate to the needs of the student referred for evaluation, and whether these interventions were implemented with fidelity by qualified personnel. Furthermore, districts need to ensure that students are being instructed by staff members who are certified in the core academic subjects or content areas in which they are teaching and have been well trained in the intervention being implemented.

As part of the SRBI process, school personnel should be gathering and analyzing data relevant to the efficacy of all three tiers. These data include the percentage of students who meet reading and math benchmarks on universal screenings at Tier I, the percentage of students who demonstrate adequate progress at Tiers II and III interventions, and suspension and expulsion data (Connecticut's *Framework for RTI*, 2008c; see also Kurns, Morrison and Batsche, 2006). For Tier I practices to be deemed effective, Connecticut's *Framework for RTI*, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c) recommends that at least 80 percent of students in a grade should be meeting important academic, behavioral and social-emotional benchmarks; similarly, interventions should be working for at least 80 percent of students at Tiers II and III. School and district personnel also should monitor the fidelity of implementation of curriculums, instruction and interventions. Data on fidelity of implementation relative to the student being referred should be considered during a comprehensive evaluation. For example, a research-based, generally effective math intervention may not help a student if key features of the intervention, such as time on task or sequence of instruction, are not implemented as intended. As in the case of adequate assessments, when members of the PPT believe that instruction or interventions are problematic, they should consider this information in the evaluation, notify educators involved in the SRBI process of their concerns, and suggest possible improvements. Data derived from appropriate instruction and/or interventions implemented with fidelity by qualified personnel are vital to rule out "lack of appropriate instruction" as a criterion for students to meet the eligibility requirements for a specific learning disability. However, the lack of such data should not be viewed, in and of itself, as a "rule-out" that would prohibit an individual student from meeting eligibility criteria as a student with a possible learning disability.

It should be recognized that some domains are less likely than others to demonstrate rapid improvement. For example, achieving rapid growth in reading comprehension and the text generation aspect of written expression probably will be more difficult than achieving rapid growth in decoding or basic writing skills. Nevertheless, for a struggling student to close the gap in learning, the rate of progress made by the student should exceed normative expectations. That is, the student who is identified as falling below grade expectations and requiring intervention should improve at a faster rate in order to catch up to the level of her or his peers.

Finally, "dual discrepancy" is one method for analyzing the gap between where a student is performing and where she or he should be and whether the student is on a trajectory to meet a specific benchmark. "Dual discrepancy" means that: 1) the student's performance level is below that expected for age or grade; and 2) the rate of progress is not sufficient, that is, it does not place the student on a trajectory to catch up. This "dual discrepancy" (level and slope) becomes a marker by which to judge responsiveness to intervention and thus document whether a student's learning difficulty is due to a lack of appropriate instruction (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2007).

## Considerations in Specific Academic Domains

This section provides additional information about the identification of students who have specific learning disabilities in the domains of reading, mathematics and written expression, as well as about common patterns of specific learning disabilities in these domains. Many of the academic difficulties experienced by students with specific learning disabilities are qualitatively similar to those experienced by other low achievers (Fletcher et al., 2007). However, one of the key requirements for a student to be identified with a specific learning disability is that the student has failed to progress sufficiently when provided with appropriate research-based interventions that are effective for most struggling students. The Reading, Mathematics and Written Expression Worksheets in Appendix B must be used to document that a student has been provided with appropriate instruction and to document the student's response to the interventions. Students must also meet the other criteria for eligibility listed on pages 27-28 and documented in the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report form (Appendix A).

**Reading.** IDEA 2004 specifies three areas of reading in which students may be determined to have a specific learning disability: basic reading skills (i.e., word decoding and word recognition), reading fluency or reading comprehension. Students with a specific learning disability in reading may be eligible in just one of these areas, or in more than one area.

There is both empirical and theoretical support that phonological sensitivity, referred to as a wide range of phonological skills, is highly predictive of a student's later success in word reading and spelling. As such, phonological sensitivity is thought to comprise the primary area underlying accurate word recognition (Goodman, Libenson and Wade-Wolley, 2010; Gray and McCutchen, 2006; Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony and Barker, 1998; Share and Stanovich, 1995; Thompson and Goswami, 2010). There is however, variation in the role phonology plays in reading acquisition. As a metalinguistic skill, phonological sensitivity progresses along a continuum that can be differentiated over time and is thought to form the cornerstone of basic reading leading to later gains in reading fluency, working memory and written language skills, including spelling (Fawcett and Nicolson, 1994; Lonigan et al., 1998; MacDonald and Cornwall, 1995; Pufpaff, 2009). Although phonological sensitivity is essential for the transition to accurate word recognition skills in older children, skill in reading should not be defined solely as accurate word recognition. Instead, skilled reading also involves both speed of access (fluency) and an adequate language-base including knowledge of vocabulary, semantic understanding and syntactic development. From a developmental standpoint, speed of access is thought to be the better predictor of reading success at the lower grades while knowledge of language is the best predictor of reading ability in the upper grades (Peverly and Kitzen, 1998).

Research on different learning disabilities in reading (e.g., Badian, 1999; Catts et al., 2005; Fletcher et al., 2007; Leach et al., 2003) suggests three types of reading disabilities, roughly aligning with the three patterns of reading difficulties discussed in the "Increasing Capacity" section. Developmental dyslexia, or simply dyslexia, is a distinct type of learning disability associated with difficulties in accurate and fluent single word decoding skills associated with poor phonological processing and rapid naming abilities (Lyon, 1995; Shaywitz 2008). Although students with dyslexia have relatively confined language difficulties in the area of phonology, the component of oral language involving the processing and manipulation of speech sounds and other oral language abilities such as vocabulary and listening comprehension are at least in the average range, so these students' abilities to obtain information through listening are generally strong. In dyslexia, the aspect of reading that is most problematic is the ability to use knowledge of letter-sound relationships and the alphabetic code (i.e., phonics) to read unfamiliar words. This is why measures involving nonsense words, which cannot be read "by sight," are particularly effective in identifying these students, and why intensive, systematic teaching of phonics, integrated with phonemic awareness instruction, is especially critical. Students with dyslexia demonstrate the

pattern of specific word decoding difficulties discussed in the “Increasing Capacity” section of this document.

Fluency is frequently poor in students with dyslexia and may reflect underlying processing difficulties (Wolf and Katzir-Cohen, 2001) and/or the cumulative lack of practice with reading that is common among struggling readers in general (Torgesen, 2001). Problems with word decoding and reading fluency frequently cause poor reading comprehension in students with dyslexia, resulting in a greater difficulty meeting general education demands for a high volume of independent reading, especially as students advance beyond the primary grades. Poor fluency sometimes persists, however, even after a student’s difficulty with word decoding has been remediated through effective phonics and phonemic awareness instruction.

Students with mixed reading disabilities have disabilities that directly affect both decoding and comprehension processes in reading. Typically, these students have broader language weaknesses that include but also extend beyond the phonological domain (e.g., vocabulary weaknesses, semantic flexibility, difficulty understanding the meaning of syntactically complex sentences). It is important to note, however, that the oral language weaknesses of some of these students may be relatively mild and not severe enough for them to qualify for speech-language services (Fletcher et al., 2007; Nation, 2005). Students with mixed reading disabilities have problems with decoding words and with fluency that are similar to those of students with dyslexia, but unlike students with dyslexia they have difficulties with reading comprehension that exceed what can be explained by poor decoding or poor fluency. For example, they may have difficulty comprehending even when reading text they can decode well, or even with verbally presented information, because of other language problems.

Finally, despite average or better phonological and word-decoding skills, students with a learning disability specific to reading comprehension demonstrate poor understanding of what they read. These students may also be identified with a specific learning disability if they meet eligibility criteria and have failed to progress with research-based comprehension interventions, as discussed further below. Some of these students display difficulties in nonphonological areas of language, such as vocabulary, syntax or text comprehension, whereas others do not (Fletcher et al., 2007). Students with specific reading comprehension disabilities usually have no history of word reading problems in the early grades. Many of these students’ difficulties may emerge only in Grade 4 or later, as the grade expectations for reading comprehension increase. (See Fletcher et al., 2007, and Spear-Swerling, 2010, for a more detailed discussion of different types of reading disabilities, including implications for screening, assessment and intervention.)

The response-to-intervention (RTI/SRBI) process is reported to have a high success rate when identifying students in need of intensive early reading intervention, but there is a growing concern that this approach frequently misses students who do not display reading deficits until later in elementary school (Catts et al., 2005; Leach et al., 2003). These students, as described above, tend to have poor reading comprehension that is based in areas of language other than phonology. Up through Grade 2, they often perform similarly to typical students, but begin to show a decline in word identification and word attack skills by third grade and deficits in comprehension by fourth grade. Frequently referred to as having “late-emerging” reading disabilities, such students present a particular challenge to the early identification and prevention purposes of SRBI and may constitute between 20 and 40 percent of all students with reading deficits (Leach et al., 2003; Davis and Compton, 2008).

If SRBI is to prevent or mitigate the negative effects of late-emerging learning disabilities in the area of reading, districts should identify indicators that accurately detect students who are likely to have difficulties that are not readily evident in the early stages of reading development. Thus, early screening in nonphonological aspects of language (i.e., oral vocabulary, grammar, syntax, broad listening comprehension) in addition to using phonological measures could improve the accuracy of early identification efforts by detecting students with comprehension-based read-

ing difficulties sooner than is currently the case. Research on specific comprehension difficulties is at a much earlier stage of development than is research on specific word recognition difficulties (Fletcher et al., 2007), yet such screening measures that focus intervention efforts on vocabulary and language comprehension might be able to prevent later reading comprehension problems. Early intervention for reading comprehension difficulties is critical, since once students have fallen substantially behind their peers in vocabulary knowledge and language comprehension, catching them up is often difficult (Biemiller, 1999).

Even at the secondary level, many students who present with difficulties in reading comprehension have problems attributable mainly to poor word decoding and/or poor reading fluency (Fletcher et al., 2007). Whether a struggling reader has decoding problems can be determined easily through a brief assessment of the student's ability to read nonsense words (e.g., *streck*, *glain*, *mibguff*). Oral reading fluency is equally easy to assess through brief, timed reading of passages. These kinds of assessments should be employed routinely to ensure that a student's reading needs have been addressed appropriately through instruction and intervention. Furthermore, assessments that meet the requirements for progress-monitoring tools noted previously are available in these areas. A student whose primary need is in the area of word decoding should have research-based interventions and progress-monitoring assessments focused on decoding skills, not comprehension. The student's comprehension development and progress are certainly important but would be addressed primarily through participation in the core (Tier I) general education program. To identify a student with a specific learning disability in reading, PPTs should verify that the student has had correctly targeted, research-based interventions, with progress that has been monitored using appropriate measures.

However, PPTs also will encounter struggling readers who have reading comprehension difficulties despite having both adequate word decoding skills and reading fluency, such as those with specific reading comprehension disabilities. In determining eligibility for services in the area of a specific learning disability, PPTs should be especially careful to ensure that these students have had interventions that accurately pinpointed and addressed their specific difficulties in the domain of comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, knowledge of text structure, inferencing, summarization, background knowledge) as much as possible. Furthermore, progress-monitoring assessments focused on decoding and oral reading fluency (e.g., words read correctly per minute from a passage) rather than comprehension are not appropriate for these students. There are some technically adequate progress-monitoring tools available for reading comprehension (see the chart referenced above), although fewer than for decoding and reading fluency. Other examples of appropriate progress-monitoring assessments for comprehension might include common formative assessments (i.e., assessments used to inform and adjust instruction, not evaluate student progress for a grade, that are the same across a grade level and/or content area) in the area of reading comprehension, class and homework grades, work products, and assessments of a student's use of comprehension strategies. Progress-monitoring assessments, like interventions, should focus on a student's specific difficulties within the domain of comprehension as much as possible. For instance, a student whose primary comprehension difficulty involves limitations in vocabulary knowledge should have progress monitoring (and intervention) specifically in the area of vocabulary.

Finally, for students with specific reading comprehension difficulties, PPTs should be especially careful to consider disabilities that could cause poor reading comprehension other than a specific learning disability, and they should rule out any other disabilities that appear relevant. For example, for students with behaviors suggestive of autism spectrum disorders, PPTs may use autism-specific behavioral checklists (see *Guidelines for Identification and Education of Children and Youth with Autism*, 2005); for students who appear to have broad cognitive delays, IQ tests and measures of adaptive functioning might be used (see *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Intellectual Disability*, 2007b).

**Written expression.** The ability to produce a written composition appears to follow its own developmental course from single-word expression to word combinations to increasingly complex syntactic structure and genre-specific discourse structures (Berninger, Abbott, Jones et al., 2006). Writing effectively requires a student to first set goals for the purpose of her or his writing (e.g., to convince, explain, relate an occurrence), keeping in mind the genre of the text (e.g., narrative, persuasive, procedural) that dictates the structure and form the writing will take. This is followed by the generation of ideas and a mapping of language to those ideas. Next, ideas need to be organized into a plan that is consistent with the purpose and the genre (e.g., sequencing of ideas, cause-effect relationships), which is then followed by the ability to produce the text (e.g., spelling, sentence construction, motor planning). Finally, the student should review and edit her or his work to improve the clarity of the text.

However, developmental distinctions should be drawn between young, inexperienced writers and experienced “experts.” Young, inexperienced writers typically tell a story based on prior experience, subject knowledge, or by using contextual cues. Because they have not yet developed reviewing and revising skills, young, inexperienced writers expectedly create “writer-based prose”: prose that inadequately communicates semantic intent to the reader. “Experts” on the other hand typically employ executive control processes, including planning, translating and revising to create “reader-based prose” that adequately communicates the writer’s intended meaning (Peverly, 2006).

Although similarities can be drawn between reading and writing, writing is not the inverse of reading (Berninger, Abbott, Jones et al., 2006). Instead, skilled writing is a cognitively effortful, demanding activity that involves a formal type of communication, produced in the absence of a listener. Because writing requires formal instruction, it may be the ultimate expression of an executive planning school task.

IDEA 2004 does not distinguish multiple components in written expression as it does in reading and mathematics. However, in evaluating students for a specific learning disability in written expression, PPTs should consider at least two broad areas: basic writing skills and text generation. As noted in the “Increasing Capacity” section, basic writing skills involve areas such as handwriting and spelling, whereas text generation refers to translating ideas into language. This distinction is helpful in determining whether a student with written-expression difficulties has received appropriate instruction, intervention and progress monitoring. As in reading and math, students may have difficulties in just one area of written expression, or in both areas.

Berninger (2009) provides a useful description of three types of learning disabilities specific to basic writing skills. First, dysgraphia involves unusual difficulties with handwriting. Second, students with dyslexia have spelling difficulties that affect the development of basic writing skills. These spelling difficulties reflect an underlying phonological weakness consistent with difficulties in word decoding. However, in students with both dysgraphia and dyslexia, the text-generation aspect of writing usually is unimpaired beyond the student’s difficulty with basic writing skills and may be an area of considerable strength, especially once the student’s basic writing difficulty has been addressed (e.g., through a combination of intervention and appropriate use of technology). Third, students with mixed reading disabilities (“oral and written language learning disability,” Berninger, 2009, p. 75) usually have written expression difficulties involving both basic writing skills and text generation, related to their phonological and other language weaknesses.

The problems of students with specific learning disabilities in reading often are compounded in written expression. Not only do these students’ underlying difficulties in phonology or other aspects of language affect their writing, but limited reading experience often affects written expression as well. For instance, over time, a limited volume of reading may affect a student’s exposure to vocabulary or background knowledge; limited vocabulary or background knowledge then creates further problems in both written expression and reading comprehension. Although specific learning disabilities in reading invariably affect written expression, it is important to rec-

ognize that disabilities in written expression can occur without accompanying reading problems, as in the case of dysgraphia or of students with poor executive function, which may affect written expression without affecting reading.

One common dynamic among students with learning disabilities in written expression is that basic writing skills are so effortful that text generation becomes extremely cumbersome, leading to limited production in writing and loss of motivation to write (Graham and Harris, 2009). Also, considerable attention has been paid to the role of executive functions as underlying the ability to use written language for learning and communicating ideas (Graham, Harris and Olinghouse, 2007). Operationally defined, executive functions serve as control processes that influence the development of reading and writing connections as well as writing output (Altemeier, Jones, Abbott and Berninger, 2006). Although there continues to be competing theories of executive functioning, there is general consensus that executive function is an overarching term applied to a set of goal directed behaviors (Anderson, 2002; Gioia, Isquith, Guy and Kenworthy, 2002). In one model of executive functioning, Zelazo, Carter, Reznick, and Frye (1997) proposed a four-part framework for understanding executive functions that includes 1) problem generation, 2) plan generation, 3) execution and 4) evaluation. This framework appears consistent with a prior viewpoint that writing involves planning, translating and reviewing (Hayes and Flowers, 1980).

Students with learning disabilities may approach writing tasks by telling what they know about a topic without necessarily having regard for the comprehension needs of the reader or the overall organization of the text. In general, their written language is shorter than their typical peers and their ability to write complete, complex or elaborated sentences may be compromised because these language forms are not ingrained in their oral language repertoire (Mackie and Dockell, 2004; Scott and Windsor, 2000). Similarly, students with learning disabilities may not have had sufficient opportunities to encounter these language forms through reading texts, and as such, they may be less able to incorporate them into their compositions. As a result of inefficient application of executive control processes, students with learning disabilities may produce text that appears somewhat idiosyncratic and that lacks coherence due to unclearly defined referents.

Unfortunately, there are far fewer published progress-monitoring tools available for written expression than for reading or mathematics. CBMs have been developed for written expression, but they tend to be more useful for basic writing skills than for other areas of writing. Also, unlike in reading, information on national norms, benchmarks and growth rates for written expression is limited, and writing CBMs can be scored in multiple ways. Nevertheless, because many struggling writers have difficulty with basic writing skills, writing CBMs may still be quite useful for progress monitoring if scored using consistent and appropriate criteria. Progress-monitoring measures that could be helpful for other areas of writing (e.g., text generation, revision and editing processes) include common formative assessments, measures of strategy use, class and homework grades, and student work samples.

Interpretation of individual students' performance on these kinds of progress-monitoring measures would be greatly enhanced if districts gathered data on overall student performance in writing by grade level. For example, a district could gather samples of student writing in each grade, K-12, representing writing on several important tasks within a given grade. The samples should include some tasks that reflect the use of a writing process and others that involve writing that is more spontaneous (i.e., where planning, revision, and editing are not possible). When compared to state standards and grade-level expectations for writing, the samples could help determine, first, whether Tier I writing instruction is effective for at least 80 percent of students in specific areas of written expression (e.g., basic writing skills vs. revision and editing); if not, then Tier I instruction in those areas should be improved. Additionally, for struggling writers, the samples could provide information that would assist in identifying and targeting students' specific writing needs, especially in areas not well addressed by CBMs, such as revision and editing processes. For students being evaluated for specific learning disabilities in written expres-



sion, PPTs should consider whether progress-monitoring assessments have appropriately targeted the student's writing difficulties, have been administered and scored in a consistent manner, and appear to be reasonably accurate indicators of a student's writing progress (or lack of it), given the constraints noted here.

If a student presents with difficulties in basic writing skills, PPTs should consider whether the student has had research-based interventions in her or his basic areas of need (e.g., handwriting vs. spelling). If a student has difficulties with text generation that exceed what can be accounted for by poor basic writing skills, PPTs should consider whether the student's difficulties stem from weaknesses in oral language, planning and organization of writing, and/or writing knowledge. Weaknesses in any of these areas should have been addressed through instruction and intervention, with the student showing insufficient progress, prior to identification of the student as having a specific learning disability in written expression. As in mathematics, vocabulary and language interventions for students with writing difficulties should include application specific to written expression, because without this application an intervention may not be successful.

Whether a student's difficulties involve basic writing skills, text generation or both areas, several other factors are important for PPTs to consider. Has the student had instruction and intervention involving reviewing, revision, and editing strategies? Has the student had adequate opportunities to practice writing? Finally, the use of technology is a particularly critical consideration in written expression. Technology can assist struggling writers in multiple ways, through grammar and spell checkers, word processors with capability for outlining and highlighting text, word prediction and phonetic spelling software, speech recognition software, and concept mapping and graphic organizing software. The use of technology can help to offset a student's difficulties in basic writing, planning, organization or text generation and thereby increase the student's motivation to write. Therefore, PPTs should examine whether students under consideration for a specific learning disability in written expression have had adequate instruction in and opportunities to use technology.

Finally, PPTs should rule out other disabilities that may account for written expression difficulties and evaluate all areas of suspected disability. Disabilities that commonly influence language development, and hence written expression, include intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorders and hearing impairments. If a student's progress in appropriate interventions has been insufficient and her or his written expression difficulties appear connected to a disability other than a specific learning disability, then PPTs should consider the student's eligibility for services in that other area. In addition, if a student is an English language learner, limited knowledge of English will also affect her or his written expression. Just as in the case of reading, to determine whether an English language learner might have a specific learning disability in written expression, PPTs should consider factors such as the student's native language and literacy skills, developmental and family history, and progress during the SRBI process.

**Mathematics.** Approximately 5-10 percent of the school-age population may be identified with mathematics disabilities (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2008). While learning disabilities in mathematics often receive less attention than those in reading, mathematics disabilities are essential to address because of the importance of math skills to educational achievement and career attainment (National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008). Under IDEA 2004, students with a specific learning disability in math may be eligible for services in one or both of the following two areas: calculation skills or problem solving.

Students with learning disabilities in mathematics often have difficulty with automatic recall of basic facts in addition, subtraction, multiplication and/or division. Poor memory for facts and reliance on counting strategies tend to impair the student's ability to perform complex calculations, such as multidigit subtraction, long division or various fraction computations. PPTs also should be aware that problems with automatic recall of math facts are common in students with

dyslexia. In these students, poor fact recall may be causally related to their core phonological weaknesses (Swanson and Beebe-Frankenberger, 2004). If a student has poor automatic recall of facts, PPTs should consider whether the student might have underlying weaknesses in basic number concepts that relate to her or his problems with automatic recall. For instance, if a student cannot accurately represent multiplication facts using pictures or manipulatives, then he or she needs instruction in that area (conceptual understanding of multiplication) prior to work on automatic recall in multiplication. However, if the student's conceptual understanding is intact and the problem is simply memorization of facts, then intervention should emphasize activities such as increased practice and instruction in number strategies (e.g., figuring out an unknown fact such as  $6 \times 6$  based on a known fact such as  $6 \times 5$ ).

Another common area of difficulty in calculation involves knowledge of algorithms, the written procedures for a particular type of calculation. The procedural knowledge required for success in mathematics beyond the primary grades is extensive. For instance, the algorithm for just one type of calculation students must learn, adding unlike fractions, involves finding the least common denominator, converting the fractions to be added into equivalent fractions with the same common denominator, adding the numerators only (because the denominator remains the same), and then converting the resulting answer into a fraction in simplest form. Furthermore, students must develop procedural fluency, that is, the ability to carry out various algorithms for calculation with ease and reasonable speed as well as with accuracy. Ensuring that students have had explicit, systematic instruction in various calculation procedures, as well as adequate opportunities to practice new calculation skills, with cumulative review of previously learned skills, is essential when PPTs are considering a student for identification with a specific learning disability in mathematics.

When evaluating students with difficulties in the area of math problem solving, PPTs should consider whether the student's difficulties exceed what can be accounted for by difficulties in calculation skills. They should rule out poor reading as a possible source of problem-solving difficulties and should consider whether interventions have appropriately addressed a student's specific weaknesses in the area of problem solving. Examples of specific difficulties in problem solving include being able to identify the operation needed to solve a problem (e.g., addition vs. subtraction); sorting out information that is relevant and not relevant to solving a problem; and determining the sequence of steps needed to solve multistep word problems. Because problem solving heavily taps vocabulary and other language skills, poor problem solving sometimes is attributable to weaknesses in these areas. For instance, students who do not know the meanings of words like *increase* or *decrease* may be unable to decide if a problem requires adding or subtracting. Although some students may have relatively limited weaknesses in understanding math-related language, other students, such as those with mixed reading disabilities discussed in the section on reading, may have broader language difficulties that affect performance in mathematics as well as in reading. Vocabulary and language interventions for students with problem-solving difficulties may not be successful unless the intervention is specifically applied to math problem solving.

Although some research has attempted to outline different subtypes of disabilities in mathematics, there is less scientific consensus regarding subtypes of math disabilities than reading disabilities (Fletcher et al., 2007). However, there is clear evidence for a subgroup of students who have impairments specifically in math calculation skills despite having adequate language and word reading skills, a profile that is sometimes termed nonverbal learning disabilities (Rourke, 2005). In other words, not all students with a specific learning disability in mathematics will have underlying language weaknesses. Before identifying any student with a specific learning disability in mathematics, PPTs should verify that the student has had research-based instruction and intervention that appropriately targeted her or his specific needs in math, with an appropriate measure used to monitor progress.

## The Need for Special Education

A student is not considered to be a “child with a disability” under IDEA 2004 unless “by reason thereof” the student needs special education and related services (34 CFR § 300.8[a][1]). Therefore, in addition to meeting all the previous criteria, in order for a student to be eligible for services under IDEA 2004, the PPT must determine that the student’s learning difficulties require specially designed instruction and related services to receive educational benefit due to the specific learning disability.

## Independent Educational Evaluations for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

An independent educational evaluation (IEE) is “an evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the public agency responsible for the education of the child in question.” (34 CFR § 300.502[a][3][i]) Parents have the right to an IEE at public expense if they disagree with an evaluation obtained by the school district; however, parents are entitled to only one IEE at public expense each time the school district conducts an evaluation with which the parents disagree (34 CFR § 300.502[b][5]). The district has the option of either providing the IEE or initiating a due process hearing to show that its evaluation is appropriate. If the hearing officer determines that the evaluation of the school district was appropriate, the parents still have the right to an IEE, but not at public expense (Connecticut Regulations, Section 10-76d-9[c][2]). The district must first complete its evaluation before a parent would have the right to obtain an IEE at public expense. The district is not required to provide an IEE at public expense or initiate a hearing to show that its evaluation is appropriate simply because the parents disagreed with district’s decision to use data from a student’s response to intervention as part of its evaluation to determine if the student has a specific learning disability and the educational needs of the student (Analysis of Comments and Changes to the 2006 Final Regulations, *Federal Register*, 71 [156], August 14, 2006, p. 46689). According to Fletcher et al., (2007), ensuring adequate opportunity to learn is a prerequisite to the identification of a specific learning disability regardless of the setting in which an evaluation is completed.

Whenever an independent evaluation is at public expense, the criteria under which the evaluation is obtained, including the location of the evaluation and the qualifications of the examiner, must be the same as the criteria that the board of education uses when it initiates an evaluation (Connecticut State Regulation, Section 10-76d-[c][5]; 34 CFR § 300.502[e][1]). Whether an independent educational evaluation is obtained at parental or school expense, a PPT must consider its findings in any decision made with respect to the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for the student (34 CFR § 300.502[c][1]). PPTs are not required to accept the recommendations of the IEE, but must, at a minimum, review and discuss the evaluation. PPTs must also adhere to the criteria for determining whether a student has a specific learning disability and is eligible for special education services as stated in the 2010 guidelines.

## 6 | Special Considerations

### Preschool-Age Children

School districts provide an elementary and secondary education to all students, including students with disabilities. Public elementary school education begins at the kindergarten grade for students who are age 5 on or before January 1 of a school year. However, the obligation to provide individually designed special education and related services to eligible students with disabilities begins at the age of 3. All school districts must provide special education to eligible preschool-age students with disabilities and may also provide a public preschool education to students without disabilities. The application of the 2010 *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* is appropriate for all students served by public schools, including the population of students served by public schools from preschool grade through Grade 12. Special consideration in applying the 2010 guidelines for the population of students in the preschool grade should be incorporated into the efforts of each school district.

It is important to recognize that young children's early learning and development are multi-dimensional and that children's developmental, functional and behavioral skills are inter-related. All children are capable of learning and growth. They can exhibit, at any point in time, individual differences in their developmental and functional growth and can demonstrate a range of skills and competencies that can be quite wide and varied. Identifying and determining whether children's early learning challenges are related to a specific disability is not always easy.

A child's learning and behavioral delays or challenges may be the result of an individual child's maturational growth and development, and/or the impact of biological or environmental factors as they relate to children and families from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Young children's delays in developmental, functional and/or pre-academic skills can be a result of limited exposure to various aspects of early learning. Preschool-age children may not have had opportunities to acquire age-expected language, early literacy, early numeracy and social-emotional and behavioral skills for a variety of reasons. Some researchers have recommended that, in general, a specific learning disability should not be identified in a preschool-age child (Fletcher et al., 2007). Therefore, a child's planning and placement team (PPT) should exercise caution in identifying young children as having a specific learning disability at the preschool, kindergarten or even first-grade level. Providing a high-quality education for all children and providing support to children who manifest learning and behavioral challenges is vital in helping to avoid or ameliorate later academic and behavioral difficulties. However, identifying young children who are in need of various levels of academic or behavioral support does not require the identification of a disability.

In a public school setting, early intervening services can be implemented for 3- and 4-year-old students in the preschool grade. These services have been referred to as "Recognition and Response," Pre-K Response to Intervention (RTI), and Pre-K Scientific-Research Based Intervention (SRBI). Regardless of the term, the goal is to identify and address a student's learning and behavioral challenges as early as possible through a tiered approach from prevention to increasing levels of intervention intensity as a means of resolving learning challenges or delays. An emphasis on research-based educational practice, prevention, intervention, the implementation of universal screening and appropriate common assessments (e.g., checklists, observations, student work samples) can improve educational programs for preschool-age children and can help plan individualized supports for children who need them through the use of a prevention and intervention hierarchy. This pyramid model can systematically be implemented and is as

relevant to the provision of a preschool education to 3- and 4-year-old children as it is to the school-age population (Coleman, Buisse and Neitzel, 2006).

As indicated previously, the intent of SRBI, Connecticut's response-to-intervention framework, is to improve education for all students in prekindergarten through Grade 12. Although the SRBI process is relevant across all grade levels, the three tiers, which are described in detail in Connecticut's *Framework for RTI*, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), are intended to focus on key academic domains (e.g., reading, mathematics, writing, content areas), as well as behavioral areas in kindergarten through Grade 12. In preschool, developmental domains are frequently used as a basis for curriculum planning and assessment. Nonetheless, all the underlying principles and key features of SRBI outlined in the previous sections of this document are applicable to the preschool population, although expectations and appropriate educational practice will differ for preschool-age students due to the unique aspects of this developmental period. For example, while the use of universal screening and common assessments are appropriate for this age group, such procedures should be implemented with the knowledge that the development of young children is uneven and that standardized assessment protocols and the assessment of discrete skills have limitations during this developmental period.

While wide variability in development is common during the early childhood period, certain difficulties suggest that young children may be at risk for specific learning disabilities. In particular, a child's history of specific language impairment (SLI) puts him or her at increased risk for later problems in learning to read (Nation, 2005; Scarborough, 2002). Specific language impairment, also termed a speech and language delay or disability, manifests as a difficulty in acquiring oral language in the first few years of life that is not caused by generalized cognitive delays or other disabilities associated with impaired language (e.g., autism spectrum disorders). It is important to note that not all children with SLI go on to have reading difficulties; however, kindergarten and primary-grade teachers should understand that some children identified with SLI in the preschool grade level may be at particular risk for difficulties in reading. A preschool history of SLI puts children at increased risk in reading even when they appear to have "caught up" to their peers in oral language functioning (Scarborough, 2002). The reading and writing progress of children with a history of SLI should be monitored especially closely in the early grades, and a history of SLI should be considered when a child's PPT is evaluating a student for a specific learning disability in reading or written expression. If a child appears to have ongoing speech-language difficulties, a speech-language assessment as a part of the student's comprehensive evaluation is essential.

Although there has been much less research on the precursors of specific learning disabilities in mathematics than in reading, some studies (e.g., Mazzocco and Thompson, 2005) indicate that difficulties with counting skills, number concepts and number recognition in preschool and kindergarten may act as a potential indicator for future learning disabilities in mathematics. Teachers of young children should be aware of the implications of these findings and should closely monitor children who demonstrate learning challenges in acquiring early numeracy and mathematics skills.

Children who receive increasing, individualized intensive pre-academic and behavioral support, do not respond to targeted supports over a reasonable period of time and who continue to manifest learning and behavioral challenges should be evaluated to determine if they are a child with a disability. The comprehensive evaluation and assessment of young preschool-age students to determine if they have a disability that will require special education and related services should include multiple components. One critical component is parent participation in the evaluation process. Parents possess key information related to their child's early development as well as information about their child's early learning opportunities and experiences. Parental concerns in one or more areas of their child's development can be identified through parental input in the evaluation process.

The importance of the early childhood years as a foundation for later school achievement has been well documented (Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet, 2006; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield and Nores, 2005). Identifying and addressing a student's learning and behavioral needs as early as possible through a tiered approach is vital and can help close the achievement gap and prevent or ameliorate later learning and behavioral difficulties.

### **Students with High Ability (Intellectual Giftedness)**

Sometimes a comprehensive evaluation for a specific learning disability may reveal that a student has very high abilities in certain cognitive or academic areas, suggesting that a student could be intellectually gifted or academically talented, as well as have a specific learning disability. Such students, sometimes identified as “twice exceptional,” are a diverse group with an advanced ability in one or more domains; however, they frequently also require adjustments in the environment that serves the needs of typical students their age as a result of their specific learning disability (Reis and Colbert, 2004). For example, some students with reading difficulties may have exceptionally strong verbal or mathematical skills, and other students with mathematical weaknesses may have exceptionally strong reading or language abilities. Specific learning disabilities occur across a range of intellectual functioning, and PPTs can expect to encounter some students with both intellectual giftedness and a specific learning disability. In particular, high-ability students with learning disabilities often are identified later in their academic career, either at the middle or high school level, even though previous referrals or requests for assistance due to difficulties in reading or writing may have been initiated in earlier grades (Reis, Neu and McGuire, 1995). As practitioners encounter this unique subset of students, it is especially important to look carefully at an individual student's patterns of strengths and weaknesses.

Researchers have identified at least three subgroups of gifted students who because of inconsistencies between their high levels of ability and difficulties with learning are potentially underrepresented in both categories (Beckley, 1998; Reis and Colbert, 2004). One group includes students identified as intellectually gifted who although they may be functioning on grade level, also exhibit difficulties in school and may be considered underachievers (McKenzie, 2009). Such students may not be identified as having a learning disability until academic demands become more rigorous and they fall significantly behind their peers. The second group is composed of students who have been identified as having a specific learning disability but whose exceptional abilities have never been recognized or addressed instructionally. The final group, which is often the most prevalent, involves students who appear to possess average abilities but who are actually performing well below their potential because their abilities and disabilities tend to disguise each other. Such high-ability students have been characterized as atypical learners who assume that learning will be easy for them and are not prepared for the difficulties that occur as a result of a possible learning disability.

In making decisions about a student's eligibility for services, PPTs should note that the strengths of intellectually gifted students could sometimes partially mask a specific learning disability. For example, an intellectually gifted student with dyslexia may compensate well enough for poor reading fluency that he or she scores within the average range on some standardized reading comprehension measures, despite having great difficulty meeting everyday classroom demands involving reading. PPTs should consider a student's overall patterns of performance in testing as well as the ability to meet everyday general education expectations when deciding whether a student has a specific learning disability. PPTs should also consider that an intellectually gifted student with a specific learning disability may expend extraordinary amounts of time and effort to achieve in school. In these cases, special education services may be appropriate. Parents can be an especially important source of information about these areas.

Practitioners should also be aware of the need to challenge students with high abilities in appropriate ways and to develop their strengths as well as address their weaknesses. For example, an intellectually gifted middle school student with dyslexia might need intervention in basic reading skills but do well in a general education class for high math achievers. Likewise a gifted student with a math disability might need intervention in calculation skills but be able to excel in advanced general education classes in reading and language arts.

## Grade Retention and Late School Entrance

Students who have been retained or who started kindergarten later than other students will most likely be older than is typical for their grade. These students may obtain significantly different scores on standardized tests depending on whether age or grade norms are used. For example, a student might fall within the average range based on grade norms but be significantly below average based on age norms from the same test. In evaluating such students, PPTs should not rely exclusively on grade-normed scores, particularly if a student displays other characteristics suggestive of a specific learning disability. For instance, a fifth-grader with difficulties in mathematics and a history of grade retention who has not responded to multiple research-based math interventions, meets exclusionary criteria and is clearly below average for her or his age, should not be excluded from identification merely because he or she has obtained grade-normed scores within the average range. As another example, consider a second grader who is experiencing reading difficulties and is older than the typical second grader due to late school entrance; the student scores within average range in reading using grade norms but is below average based on age norms. The PPT finds, through the student's parents or an examination of records, that the student started kindergarten late due to concerns about her or his language development. In this situation, the PPT should consider that the student's history might in fact reflect the underlying language weakness often associated with a specific learning disability in reading.

In these kinds of cases, rigid adherence to grade norms in evaluating students who otherwise meet criteria for a specific learning disability may inappropriately delay identification. IDEA 2004 requires that a range of information be considered in a comprehensive evaluation and allows determination of low achievement based on grade *or* age. It should also be noted that, as discussed in Connecticut's *Framework for RTI* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c), grade retention is not an intervention (p.16). Conversely, advancing a student from grade to grade does not necessarily indicate "progress," and thus cannot be used as a rationale for not exploring the possibility of a student being eligible for special education services due to a possible learning disability.

## Reevaluation and Determination of Continued Eligibility

The Planning and Placement Team has the responsibility to conduct a reevaluation of each student receiving special education and related services at least once every three years, unless the parent and school agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary. A reevaluation can be done more often at the request of a student's parent or teacher, but not more than once a year, unless the parent and school agree that a reevaluation is needed (Connecticut Special Education Regulations § 10-76d-9; 34 CFR § 300.303[b]). The district must obtain parental consent to conduct the reevaluation unless the district can demonstrate that it has taken reasonable steps to obtain consent and the parent has failed to respond (see 34 CFR § 300.300[c]). Parental consent is not required before reviewing existing data as part of a reevaluation, or administering a test or other evaluation that is administered to all students unless before administration of that test or evaluation, consent is required of parents of all students (see 34 CFR § 300.300[d]). Thus, the collection of

progress-monitoring data as part of a reevaluation does not require parental consent. In addition to continuation of eligibility, a PPT designs and conducts a reevaluation for the purposes of determining:

- whether the child continues to have a disability and the educational needs of the child;
- the present levels of academic achievement and related developmental needs of the child;
- whether the child continues to need special education and related services; and
- whether any additions or modifications to the special education and related services are needed to enable the child to meet the measurable annual goals set out in the IEP of the child and to participate, as appropriate, in the general education curriculum. (34 CFR § 300.305[a][2][iv]).

The reevaluation of a student with a learning disability is designed in the same way as an initial eligibility evaluation, with parents participating as team members. The PPT conducts it using procedures that are consistent with the statutory and regulatory requirements of reevaluation, including the most recent criteria that a student “has been provided with explicit and systematic instruction in the essential components of scientific, research-based reading instruction or math from a qualified teacher, including documentation of regular assessments of achievement” (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2009). As part of a reevaluation, a PPT must review existing evaluation data (e.g., progress-monitoring CBMs, curriculum-based assessments, common formative assessments, grades, progress on IEP goals and objectives, State assessments), which must also include information from the student’s parents as well as classroom observations (34 CFR § 300.305) to determine if any additional data are needed. Such a review may be sufficient for the PPT to re-determine eligibility and address the other purposes outlined above. However, a PPT must evaluate a student with a disability before determining that the student is no longer a child with a disability (34 CFR § 300.305[e]). As with an initial evaluation for a student with a possible learning disability, the PPT must complete the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report form and any appropriate worksheets (reading, mathematics, written expression) to document that the child has received appropriate instruction and intervention in an area or areas of difficulty.

In most situations, it is presumed that the initial eligibility process was valid and that the student will continue to be a student with a disability and eligible for special education and related services unless there are data that indicate otherwise. Evidence may include documentation of a student’s ability to benefit from the general education curriculum without the need for specialized instruction.

*States that change their eligibility criteria for SLD may want to carefully consider the reevaluation of children found eligible for special education services using prior procedures. States should consider the effect of exiting a child from special education who has received special education and related services for many years and how the removal of such supports will affect the child’s educational progress, particularly for a child who is in the final year(s) of high school. Obviously, the group should consider whether the child’s instruction and overall special education program have been appropriate as part of this process. If the special education instruction has been appropriate and the child has not been able to exit special education, this would be strong evidence that the child’s eligibility needs to be maintained – Analysis of Comments and Changes to the 2006 Final Regulations, Federal Register, 71 (156), August 14, 2006, p. 46648.*

A reevaluation may sometimes show that a student’s gap in learning (in both level of per-



formance and rate of growth) has been reduced due to interventions in special education and perhaps also in general education. If it is the consensus of the PPT that the student's gap in learning would reemerge with the discontinuation of special education services, the student should continue to be identified as being eligible for special education services as a student with a specific learning disability. PPTs should be extremely careful in deciding that a student is no longer eligible for special education services under IDEA because this decision has ramifications for accessing support services and accommodations once IDEA eligibility ends. Reevaluation requires that members of the PPT exercise professional judgment when reviewing all of the evaluation data in light of a student's previous history as well as current progress.

Sometimes the PPT may find it appropriate to conduct a more comprehensive reevaluation, for example, at major school transitions, such as the transition from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school. For example, providing a more comprehensive reevaluation during a student's high school years may help the PPT appropriately identify transition services, including courses of study, that are needed to assist the student in reaching her or his postsecondary goals. All students between the ages of 16 and 21 who are receiving special education services must have appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals that are "based upon age-appropriate transition assessments" (34 CFR § 300.320[b]). To facilitate this transition from school to post-school activities, IDEA 2004 established a new requirement calling for a "summary of academic and functional performance" for every student who exits special education by graduating with a regular diploma or exceeding the age for special education under state law. The summary must include recommendations for helping the student to achieve postsecondary goals contained in the student's IEP. IDEA 2004 makes it clear that schools are no longer required to reevaluate students upon exit from special education, if the exiting is due to graduation from high school with a regular diploma or due to exceeding the age eligibility for FAPE (through the end of the school year in which the student turns 21 in Connecticut) see Connecticut Special Education Regulations Section 10-76d-(a)(7) (34 CFR § 300.305). Nevertheless, appropriate assessments updated in connection with the Summary of Performance can greatly assist students' transition to postsecondary education and employment, as discussed further below in the section on "Issues in Identification at the Middle and High School Levels."

## 7 | Issues in Identification at the Middle and High School Levels

### Emergence of Specific Learning Disabilities at the Elementary vs. Secondary Level

**W**hile the primary focus of scientific research-based interventions (SRBI) has been on students in kindergarten through third grade, IDEA 2004 includes implementation of student responsiveness-to-intervention through 12th grade. In fact, as students who lack the foundational skills and strategies necessary to access the curriculum progress into secondary schools, there is an urgent need to provide a continuum of academic and behavioral supports to avoid the cycle of failure and high dropout rates characteristic of at-risk students (Coyne, Simonsen and Faggella-Luby, 2008). An SRBI framework therefore can continue to benefit students at these upper grade levels.

Presumably, if school personnel are providing high quality SRBI interventions with fidelity through a multitiered model of education and conducting continuous assessment of student progress to guide instructional decisions, they should know during the elementary years whether a student's learning difficulties are persisting. Therefore, many students with a specific learning disability will be identified roughly between second grade and fifth grade. A specific learning disability may manifest at the middle or secondary level in students who have not previously been identified, although relatively few students should be referred for the first time without a previous history of difficulties and efforts to address them.

Nonetheless, there are several reasons why, even with highly competent elementary-level efforts at early identification and intervening services, a specific learning disability may surface in some students at later grade levels. First, the transition from elementary to middle/secondary school contexts involves numerous challenges for all students, as discussed in "Increasing Capacity." Furthermore, in elementary school, some students may have compensated for mild learning problems on their own and not experienced sufficient difficulties to warrant a referral for a specific learning disability until the work increased in volume or complexity in middle or high school. For example, poor reading fluency may become especially problematic as a student advances into middle school and is expected to manage a much larger amount of independent reading. Underlying math weaknesses may impact not only secondary-level math achievement but science achievement as well because of the demands that more advanced science courses make on mathematical concepts and skills. Alternatively, students may respond to core general education (Tier I) differentiation of instruction or supplemental (Tier II) interventions during the elementary years, but because of changing academic demands or more complex learning environments in middle or high school, may require more intensive supplemental (Tier III) intervention and/or referral for special education services.

### Identification Issues at the Secondary Level

Two particular issues confront PPTs regarding the evaluation and identification of a student for a specific learning disability at the middle or secondary level. First, it can be difficult to find adequate progress-monitoring assessments for students at these levels, especially if the students' weaknesses involve higher-order reading comprehension, written expression or mathematics skills.

Progress monitoring in these more advanced areas is challenging and requires reliance on multiple measures such as common formative assessments, student work products, grades and writing samples. These measures may have numerous limitations, for example, questionable reliability or poor sensitivity to student growth. Second, there are fewer research-based interventions for students in these higher-order areas than for basic reading, writing and math skills.

However, some curriculum-based measurements (CBMs) can still be useful for secondary-level struggling students, particularly if those students' difficulties involve basic skills such as decoding, basic writing skills, or calculation. For instance, oral reading fluency passages can be used to monitor progress in students with decoding or fluency difficulties who are functioning at elementary levels in reading, even if they are of middle or high school age. Furthermore, many older struggling students do have basic skill weaknesses for which numerous resources for intervention are available (see Connecticut's *Framework for RTI*, Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c). In addition, PPTs should consider whether Tier I instruction in the middle or secondary school is addressing the common difficulties of students at those grade levels, as discussed in the "Increasing Capacity" section. Despite these complexities in evaluation at middle and secondary levels, in determining whether a student has a specific learning disability, PPTs must decide whether they can reasonably rule out lack of appropriate instruction as the cause of the student's problems.

At the middle or secondary levels, PPTs should be especially careful to consider a range of information in deciding whether a student has a specific learning disability, including information from parents and a student's current and past patterns of difficulties. In addition to the criteria for eligibility on pages 27-28, some patterns suggestive of a possible learning disability include:

- a history of specific language impairment or language difficulties, even if a student's language abilities currently appear to be in the average range (with consideration of native-language development and abilities for students who are English language learners);
- a history of supplemental intervention related to the student's area of difficulty at previous grade levels;
- difficulties in linguistic, cognitive or processing areas related to the student's area of academic difficulty (e.g., for basic reading, phonological difficulties; for reading fluency, slow naming speed; for reading comprehension, poor working memory, vocabulary or syntactic competence; for written expression, poor performance on measures of executive function; and for mathematics, poor performance on measures of quantitative concepts or reasoning); and
- a pattern of similar academic or language difficulties in other close family members, assuming those family members have had adequate educational opportunities.

## Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment

Recent data suggest that the vast majority of secondary students with learning disabilities in Connecticut enroll in postsecondary institutions, often in combination with employment (Madaus, 2008). Under current disability legislation, there is a disconnect between secondary and postsecondary institutions with regard to the nature, recency and comprehensiveness of documentation data necessary to determine a disability and the need for accommodations, causing much frustration and confusion for education professionals, parents and students. Postsecondary institutions and employers are under no obligation to identify or provide evaluations for students with a specific learning disability and secondary schools are not obligated to provide an updated comprehensive evaluation for a student who is graduating from high school. However, all indi-

viduals with disabilities are protected from discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008 (ADAAA), and they may also be eligible for services under both ADAAA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Under these laws, an individual is required to submit documentation of her or his disability and its limitations to a major life activity, such as learning or working. Without this documentation, individuals with a specific learning disability may not be eligible for accommodations and services in postsecondary education or employment settings, or they may need to obtain documentation privately, at considerable expense.

As of January 1, 2009, substantial revisions of the ADA, and as a result, Section 504, through the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA, 2008), have affected how postsecondary institutions determine eligibility for services and the need for accommodations using assessment data provided by secondary schools. Because of a broadened interpretation of the meaning of a “substantial impairment” and a more expansive definition of major life activities, disability services providers at the postsecondary level will now be hard pressed to find that a student who received services under IDEA or Section 504 in high school is not an individual with a disability under ADAAA (Shaw, Keenan, Madaus and Banerjee, 2010). Nonetheless, postsecondary education institutions and some employers will continue to require documentation to determine if a student is a “qualified person with a disability” and the functional impact of the disability in order to determine “reasonable accommodations.” The primary difference under the ADAAA, according to Shaw et al. (2010), will be that the focus of the analysis of the documentation required of students exiting high school will shift to determining the functional impact of the disability and the services and accommodations needed as opposed to whether the person is an individual with a disability.

Under IDEA 2004, school districts are not required to assess students for the purpose of determining eligibility for services in post-school environments (Madaus and Shaw, 2006); however, districts are required to facilitate a student’s transition from school to post-school activities, such as postsecondary education and employment (34 CFR § 300.43). Therefore PPTs should carefully consider the evaluation data necessary to help a student to meet postsecondary goals and facilitate the student’s transition to appropriate post-school activities. For students receiving special education services, especially those with a hidden disability (i.e., a disability that is not obviously apparent or visible), such as a specific learning disability, appropriate documentation that informs professionals at the postsecondary level about the types of services and accommodations necessary for the student to participate under conditions that are similar to those experienced by other students and be successful are a critical component of the transition planning required under IDEA 2004. All evaluations, regardless of when they were performed, should provide objective evidence of the functional impact of a student’s disability. The data collected in schools implementing schoolwide support models, such as a Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) framework and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), will provide useful information on the academic and behavioral impact of a student’s disability (Shaw, et al., 2010).

Secondary-level Planning and Placement Teams can greatly facilitate a student’s transition to postsecondary life through two requirements of IDEA 2004. The first requirement involves developing appropriate postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments, including evaluation data to document a student’s present levels of academic and functional performance that are critical for use in developing annual IEP goals and objectives at each student’s annual review. The second involves the Summary of Performance (SOP, ED 635), a document that districts are required to provide to students with IEPs who are exiting high school either due to graduation or aging out. The SOP is a summary of a student’s academic achievement and functional performance (e.g., organizational skills, test-taking skills, time management, ability to work as a team member, interpersonal communication, self-advocacy), including recommendations about how to help a student meet her or his postsecondary goals. In particular, students who transi-

tion to postsecondary education with a comprehensive SOP will present strong evidence of the current functional impact of their disability for determining reasonable academic accommodations under the ADA/Section 504. A well-constructed and comprehensive SOP is a blueprint that provides past evidence of a student's academic achievements, as well as any accommodations that have been used and the extent to which such accommodations have been effective (Shaw, et al., 2010). The SOP can be used as a living document created early in a student's secondary career and developed over time, with input from the student as well as parents, educators and other professionals, and updated with recent assessments shortly before the student exits special education (Madaus, Bigaj, Chafouleas and Simonsen, 2006). This document offers a potentially powerful mechanism to present information about a student's specific learning disability to postsecondary schools and employers, including information about the student's strengths as well as her or his needs and accommodations and services that have proven to be successful.

## 8 | Recommended Practices for Consistent Identification

An important goal in developing the 2010 *Guidelines for Identifying Students with Learning Disabilities* is to assist local school districts in achieving consistent procedures for identifying a specific learning disability. Districts can achieve this goal through careful adherence to the guidelines described in the previous sections of this document, as well as by following recommended practices described below.

### Self-Evaluation of Capacity

School districts have an ethical responsibility to avoid identifying a student as having a learning disability when, in fact, it may be the system that is failing the student. Furthermore, federal law requires ruling out lack of appropriate instruction prior to identifying a student with a specific learning disability. The “Increasing Capacity” section of this document details the necessary continuum of supports, such as those involved in an SRBI framework, that should be in place in general education, as well as the kinds of comprehensive curriculums that should be used in reading, mathematics and written expression. Local district administrators should meet with the appropriate personnel to conduct an internal self-evaluation to determine which components of an SRBI framework are already in place in key academic domains as well as for behavior and social-emotional learning. In particular, the self-evaluation should consider whether general education practices (e.g., curriculums, instructional strategies, assessments, behavior supports) are both *consistent* (e.g., across teachers) and *research-based* to the extent possible, as discussed in this document and in Connecticut’s *Framework for RTI*, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008c). The needs of a particular school population, as indicated by common assessments, district analysis of available data (see below), and other relevant data, should also be considered. For example, a school with a large number of English language learners might need an increased emphasis on instruction and interventions to meet the needs of this population, relative to a school with few English language learners. Time and effort expended on developing effective general education practices can go a long way toward eliminating or reducing many students’ difficulties, and in turn, will facilitate appropriate identification practices for students with learning disabilities. Local administrators should identify areas of need based on the self-evaluation and develop an action plan to meet those needs.

### District Analysis of Available Data

The CSDE provides each district with an annual Strategic School Profile (SSP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) that include special education data based on the previous year’s October 1 Child Count. Data can also be obtained and depicted graphically using the Connecticut Education Data and Research (CEDaR) portal on the CSDE’s Web site. Using these sources, districts and the public can compare the identification rates for various disabilities across districts and the state. Additional in-depth data are also available via the Special Education Data Application and Collection (SEDAC) database, which allows districts to examine their population of students identified with specific learning disabilities. District- and building-level subgroups of this population by gender, ethnicity, English language proficiency, grade, age, hours of service, amount of time with non-disabled peers, and location of service, also can be obtained via

SEDAC. Districts are strongly encouraged to access and use these data as a basis for professional development, school improvement plans and procedural practices.

### **Uniform Professional Development Opportunities**

Training general and special education teachers and student support services professionals together on topics of critical importance would help to promote consistent application of these guidelines. Professional development of groups of educators and/or parents within a school or district would provide all interested parties with an opportunity to discuss the changes in guidelines for identification of learning disabilities, to learn about the rationale for these changes, and to voice questions and concerns. Particular consideration should be given to establishing consistent schoolwide or districtwide educational practices that are research-based, as well as establishing uniform procedures for the referral and comprehensive evaluation processes that adhere to these guidelines. Information about important resources for the implementation of the guidelines, such as the resources referenced in the next section of this document, should also be shared widely.

### **Case Reviews and Clinical Conferencing**

Besides the types of professional development opportunities noted above, opportunities for evaluators in a district to dialogue with each other about identification issues are critical. Case review and clinical conferencing processes provide excellent vehicles for professionals to discuss their application of these guidelines in determining eligibility for special education services based on a specific learning disability. Such discussions and reflection can promote a common understanding and consistent decision making within the district. Providing opportunities for teams of evaluators from several districts to engage in similar dialogues would be useful in promoting statewide consistency.

### **Core Assessments**

A comprehensive evaluation for a student suspected of having a specific learning disability must be designed on an individual basis. It is appropriate, nevertheless, for a district to identify a core battery of assessments that the evaluation team will use and modify based on the individual needs of the student. Particular attention should be paid to: 1) choosing technically adequate nonbiased tests; 2) including assessments of important component abilities in reading, written expression, and mathematics; and 3) using consistent, appropriate types of scores (e.g., for norm-referenced standardized tests, standard scores and percentile ranks). Modifications of the core battery may include substituting different tests, adding to the battery, and eliminating selected tests based on a student's grade or age, pattern of difficulties, and the professional judgment of the multidisciplinary team and the evaluators. The use of a core assessment framework can facilitate training and dialogue around identification issues.

### **Core Diagnostic Team**

Determining eligibility for special education and related services on the basis of a specific learning disability is a complex process that requires a broad knowledge base in many areas, competent testing and diagnostic skills, and experience. Individual professionals often have strengths in different areas; one person may be especially knowledgeable about SRBI, reading or mathematics,

for example, whereas another may be especially skilled in test administration and interpretation. To promote the consistent and appropriate identification of students with specific learning disabilities, each district is encouraged to identify a team or teams of specialists that can collectively bring together all these important skills and knowledge. The core diagnostic team would not replace the need for other kinds of teams, such as the data teams and intervention teams associated with an SRBI framework that provide a comprehensive range of supports and services within a school. However, a given professional might well serve as part of more than one team depending on her or his areas of expertise and professional responsibilities.



## References

- Aaron, P. G., Joshi, M., Gooden, R., and Bentum, K. (2008). Diagnosis and treatment of reading disabilities based on the component model of reading: An alternative to the discrepancy model of LD. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 41*, 67-84.
- Allington, R. L., and McGill-Franzen, A. (in press). Comprehension difficulties among struggling readers. *Handbook of Research on Comprehension*.
- Al Otaiba, S. (2001). Children who do not respond to early literacy instruction: A longitudinal study across kindergarten and first grade. *Reading Research Quarterly, 36*, 344-346.
- Altemeier, L., Jones, J., Abbott, R., and Berninger, V. (2006). Executive functions in becoming writing readers and reading writers: Note taking and report writing in third and fifth grade. *Developmental Neuropsychology, 29*, 161-173.
- Anderson, P. (2002). Assessment and development of executive function during childhood. *Child Neuropsychology, 8*, 71-82.
- August, D. & Hakuta, K. (Eds.). (1998). *Educating Language Minority Children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Badian, N. (1999). Reading disability defined as a discrepancy between listening and reading comprehension: A longitudinal study of stability, gender differences, and prevalence. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 32*, 138-148.
- Baker, S., Gersten, R., and Lee, D. S. (2002). A synthesis of empirical research on teaching mathematics to low-achieving students. *Elementary School Journal, 103*, 51-73.
- Beckley, D. (Spring, 1998). "Gifted and Learning Disabled: Twice exceptional students." *The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented Newsletter, 6-10*. Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut. [NOTE: this is also an ERIC Document ED424711] – Available online at: <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/newsletter/spring98/sprng984.html>.
- Berninger, V. W. (2009). Highlights of programmatic, interdisciplinary research on writing. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 24*, 69-80.
- Berninger, V. W. (2010). Assessing and intervening with children with written language disorders. In D. C. Miller (Ed.), *Best Practices in School Neuropsychology: Guidelines for Effective Practice, Assessment, and Evidence-Based Intervention* (pp. 507-520). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Berninger, V.W.; Abbott, R.D.; Jones, J.; Gould, L.; Anderson-Youngstrom, M.; Shimada, S. and Apel, K. (2006). Early development of language by hand: Composing, reading, listening, and speaking connections; three letter-writing modes; and fast mapping in spelling. *Developmental Neuropsychology, 29*, 61-92.
- Berninger, V. W., and Amtmann, D. (2003). Preventing written expression disabilities through early and continuing assessment and intervention for handwriting and/or spelling problems: Research into practice. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris, and S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (pp. 345-363). New York: Guilford.

## References

- Biemiller, A. (1999). *Language and reading success*. Newton Upper Falls, MA: Brookline Books.
- Brown-Chidsey, R. and Steege, M. W. (2005). *Response to Intervention: Principles and Strategies for Effective Practice*. New York: Guilford.
- Catts, H. W., Hogan, T. P., and Adlof, S. M. (2005). Developmental changes in reading and reading disabilities. In H. W. Catts and A. Kamhi (Eds.), *The connections between language and reading disabilities* (pp. 25-40). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Coleman, M.R.; Roth, F.P. and West, T. (2009). *Roadmap to Pre-K RTI: Applying Response to Intervention in Preschool Settings*. New York, NY: National Center for Learning Disabilities.
- Connecticut ADHD Task Force. (2005). *Report on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet. (2006). *Ready by 5 and Fine by 9: Connecticut's Early Childhood Investment Framework*. Retrieved June 21, 2007, from The Early Childhood Research and Policy Council Web site: [http://www.ctearlychildhood.org/Content/Ready\\_by\\_5\\_and\\_Fine\\_by\\_9.asp](http://www.ctearlychildhood.org/Content/Ready_by_5_and_Fine_by_9.asp).
- Connecticut State Board of Education. (2001). *Position Statement on the Education of Students Acquiring English as a Second Language*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Board of Education. (2001). *Position Statement on the Education of Students with Disabilities*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (1999). *Guidelines for identifying children with learning disabilities* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2000). *Connecticut's blueprint for reading achievement: The report of the Early Reading Success Panel*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2005). *Guidelines for identification and education of children and youth with autism*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2006). *A superior education for Connecticut's 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners: Five-year comprehensive plan for education, 2006-2011*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2007a). *Beyond the Blueprint: Literacy in Grades 4-12 and Across the Content Areas*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2007b). *Guidelines for identifying children with intellectual disability*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2008a). *A Model for Mathematics Curriculum for Grades PreK-8*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2008b). *Guidelines for Speech and Language Programs: Determining Eligibility for Special Education Speech and Language Services Under IDEA*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2008c). *Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: Improving Education for all Students, Connecticut's Framework for RTI* (full

- publication). Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2009). Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities: Executive Summary. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Connecticut State Department of Education. (2010). *Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching: Foundational Skills*. Hartford, CT: Author.
- Cortiella, C., and Burnette, J. (2008). Challenging change: How schools and districts are improving the performance of special education students. New York, NY: National Center for Learning Disabilities.
- Council for Exceptional Children. (2008). CEC's position on response to intervention (RTI): The unique role of special education and special educators. Retrieved March 9, 2010, from: <http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=9640>
- Coyne, M., Simonsen, B, and Faggella-Luby, M. (2008). Cooperating initiatives: Supporting behavioral and academic improvement through a systems approach. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(6), 54-59.
- Davis, N. and Compton, D.L. (2008). "Falling through the cracks: Children who are exceptions to the RTI identification process." *Perspectives on Language Learning and Education*, 15, 41-45.
- Denton, C. A., Fletcher, J. M., Anthony, J. L., and Francis, D. J. (2006). An evaluation of intensive intervention for students with persistent reading difficulties. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 39, 447-466.
- Donovan, M. S. and Cross, C. T. (Eds.). (2002). *Minority Students in Special Education*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Drame, E. R. (2002). Sociocultural context effects on teachers' readiness to refer for learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 69, 41-53.
- Englert, C. S., Okolo, C. M., and Mariage, T. V. (2009). Informational writing across the curriculum. In G. A. Troia (Ed.), *Instruction and Assessment for Struggling Writers: Evidence-Based Practices* (pp. 132-162). New York: Guilford.
- Fawcett, A. J. and Nicolson, R. I. (1994). Naming Speed in Children with Dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 27, 641-646.
- Fitzgerald, J., and Shanahan, T. (2000). Reading and writing relations and their development. *Educational Psychologist*, 35, 39-50.
- Fletcher, J. M., Lyon, G. R., Fuchs, L. S., and Barnes, M. A. (2007). *Learning disabilities: From identification to intervention*. New York: Guilford.
- Fletcher, J. M., Morris, R. D., and Lyon, G. R. (2003). Classification and definition of learning disabilities: An integrative perspective. In H. Swanson, K., Harris, and S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (pp. 30-56). New York: Guilford.
- Floyd, R.; Keith, T.; Taub, G. and McGrew, K. (2007). "Cattell-Horn-Carroll cognitive abilities and their effects on reading decoding skills: g has indirect effects, more specific abilities have direct effects." *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22, 200-233.

- Frisby, C. (2005). "The Politics of Multiculturalism in School Psychology: Part 1." In C.L. Frisby and D.R. Reynolds (Eds.), *Comprehensive Handbook of Multicultural School Psychology* (pp. 45-80). Putnam, CT: John Wiley & Sons.
- Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., McMaster, K., and Al Otaiba, S. (2003). Identifying children at risk for reading failure: Curriculum-based measurement and the dual-discrepancy approach. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris, and S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (pp. 431-449). New York: Guilford.
- Fuchs, D. and Fuchs, L. (2007). "A Model for Implementing Response to Intervention." *Council for Exceptional Children*, 39, 14-20.
- Fuchs, L. (2004). The past, present, and future of curriculum-based measurement research. *School Psychology Review*, 33, 188-192.
- Fuchs, L.S., Compton, D.L., Fuchs, D., Paulsen, K., Bryant, J.D., and Hamlett, C.L. (2005). The prevention, identification, and cognitive determinants of math difficulty. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 97, 493-513.
- Fuchs, L.S. and Fuchs, D. (2008). Mathematics disabilities in the primary grades: Seven principles of effective practice. *Division for learning disabilities*, 26(1).
- Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., and Hollenbeck, K. N. (2007). Extending responsiveness to intervention to mathematics at first and third grades. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 22, 13-24.
- Genesee, F.; Paradis, J. and Crago, M. (2004). *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.
- Gerber, M. M. and Durgunoglu, A. Y., guest editors. (2004). "Reading risk and intervention for young English learners" (special series). *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 19, 199-272.
- Gersten R. and Baker, S. (2001). "Teaching expressive writing to students with learning disabilities: A Meta-Analysis." *The Elementary School Journal*, 101,251-272.
- Gioia, G.A., Isquith, P., Kenworthy, L., and Barton, R. (2002). Profiles of everyday executive function in acquired and developmental disorders. *Child Neuropsychology*, 8, 121-137.
- Goodman, I.; Libenson, A.; Wade-Woolley, L. (2010). Sensitivity to linguistic stress, phonological awareness and early reading ability in preschoolers. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 33, 113-127.
- Graham, S., and Harris, K. R. (2003). Students with learning disabilities and the process of writing: A meta-analysis of SRSD studies. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris, and S. Graham (Eds), *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (pp. 323-344). New York: Guilford.
- Graham, S., and Harris, K. R. (2009). Almost 30 years of writing research: Making sense of it all with *The Wrath of Khan*. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 24, 58-68.
- Graham, S., Harris, K. R., and Fink, B. (2000). Is handwriting causally related to learning to write? Treatment of handwriting problems in beginning writers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92, 620-633.
- Graham, S., Harris, K.R., and Olinghouse, N. (2007). In L. Meltzer (Ed.), *Executive function in education* (pp. 216-236). New York: Guilford.

- Graham, S., and Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.
- Gray, A. and McCutchen, D. (2006). Young reader's use of phonological information: Phonological awareness, memory and comprehension. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 39, 325-333.
- Gunderson, L., and Siegel, L. (2001). The evils of the use of IQ tests to define learning disabilities in first- and second-language learners. *The Reading Teacher*, 55, 48-55.
- Guthrie, J. T. and Humenick, N. M. (2004). Motivating students to read: Evidence for classroom practices that increase reading motivation and achievement. In P. McCardle and V. Chhabra. (Eds.) *The Voice of Evidence in Reading Research* (pp. 329-354). Baltimore: Brookes.
- Hallahan, D., and Mock, D. (2003). A brief history of the field of learning disabilities. In H. L. Swanson, K. R. Harris, and S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (pp. 16-29). New York: Guilford.
- Hallenbeck, M. J. (2002). Taking charge: Adolescents with learning disabilities assume responsibility for their own writing. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 25(4), 227-246.
- Harry, B. and Klingner, J. 2006. *Why are so Many Minority Students in Special Education? Understanding Race & Disability in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hasbrouck, J. and Tindal, G. A. (2006). "Oral reading fluency norms: A valuable assessment tool for reading teachers." *The Reading Teacher*, 59, 636-644.
- Hayes, J.R., and Flowers, L.S. (1980). Identifying the organization of writing processes. In L.W. Gregg & E.R. Steinbert (Eds.), *Cognitive processes in writing* (pp. 3-30). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hooper, S.R.; Swartz, C.W.; Wakely, M.B.; de Druif, R.E.L. and Montgomery, J.W. (2002). Executive functions in elementary school children with and without problems in written expression. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 35, 57-68.
- Hosp, M.; Hosp, J. and Howell, K. (2007). *The ABCs of CBM: A Practical Guide to Curriculum-Based Measurement*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Hudson, R. F.; Lane, H. B. and Pullen, P. C. (2005). Reading fluency assessment and instruction: What, why, and how? *The Reading Teacher*, 58, 702-714.
- Hulme, C.; Snowling, M.; Caravolas, M. and Carroll, J. (2005). "Phonological skills are (probably) one cause of success in learning to read: A comment on Castles and Coltheart." *Scientific Studies of Reading* 9, 351-365.
- Johnson, E.S.; Humphrey, M.; Mellard, D.F; Woods, K. and Swanson, H.L. (2010). "Cognitive processing deficits and students with Specific Learning Disabilities: A selective meta-analysis of the literature, *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 33, 3 – 18.
- Juel, C., and Minden-Cupp, C. (2000). Learning to read words: Linguistic units and instructional strategies. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35, 458-492.
- Kavale, K.A. and Spaulding L.S.(2008). "Is Response to Intervention good policy for Specific

## References

- Learning Disability?" *Learning Disabilities Practice*, 23, 169-179.
- Kurns, S.; Morrison, D. and Batsche, G. (2006). *Response to intervention: Blueprints for implementation at the state, district, and local levels*. NASDSE Satellite Conference Series. Retrieved January 30, 2009 from <http://www.casecec.org/powerpoints/rti/RtI CASE.ppt>.
- Lane, K. L.; O'Shaughnessy, T. E.; Lambros, K. M.; Gresham, F. M. and Beebe-Frankenberger, M. E. (2002). "The efficacy of phonological awareness training with first-grade students who have behavior." *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 9, 219-231.
- Leach, J. M., Scarborough, H. S., and Rescorla, L. (2003). "Late-emerging reading disabilities." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95, 211-224.
- Learning Disabilities Association of America. (2006). Response to Intervention: Position paper of the Learning Disabilities Association of America. Retrieved March 9, 2010, from <http://www.ldanatl.org/about/position/rti.asp>
- Lichtenstein, R. and Klotz, M.B. (2007). "Deciphering the federal regulations on Identifying children with specific learning disabilities, *NASP Communique*, 36(3).
- Lonigan, C.J.; Burgess, S. R.; Anthony, J. L.; and Barker, T. A. (1998). Development of phonological sensitivity in 2- to 5-year-old children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 294-311.
- Losen, D. and Orlied, G. (2002). *Racial inequality in special education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Civil Rights Project, Harvard Press.
- Lyon, G. R. (1995). Toward a definition of dyslexia. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 45, 3-30.
- MacArthur, C. A. (2006). Effects of new technologies on writing. In C. A. MacArthur, S. Graham, and J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Handbook of Writing Research* (pp. 248-262). New York: Guilford.
- MacArthur, C. A. (2009a). Reflections on research on writing and technology for struggling writers. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 24, 93-103.
- MacArthur, C. A. (2009b). Using technology to teach composing to struggling writers. In G. A. Troia (Ed.), *Instruction and Assessment for Struggling Writers: Evidence-Based Practices* (pp. 243-265). New York: Guilford.
- MacDonald, G. W. and Cornwall, A. (1995). The Relationship between Phonological Awareness and Reading and Spelling Achievement Eleven Years Later. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 28, 523-527.
- Mackie, C. and Dockrell, J.E. (2004). The nature of written language deficits in children with SLI. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 47, 1469-1483.
- Madaus, J. W. and Shaw, S. F. (2006). "The impact of the IDEA 2004 on transition to college for students with learning disabilities." *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 21(4), 273-281.
- Madaus, J. W. (2008). Connecticut Post-School Outcomes Survey: 2007 *Exiters of Special Education Services, Final Report*. Storrs, CT: Center on Postsecondary Education and Disability.
- Madaus, J. W.; Bigaj, S.; Chafouleas, S. and Simonsen, B. (2006). "What key information can be included in a comprehensive summary of performance?" *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 29(2), 90-99.

## References

- Marzano, R. J.; Pickering, D. J. and Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Baltimore, MD: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Mastropieri, M.A. and Scruggs, T.E. (2005). "Feasibility and consequences of response to intervention: Examination of the issues and scientific evidence as a model for the identification of individuals with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38, 525-531.
- Mazzocco, M. M. M., and Thompson, R. E. (2005). Kindergarten predictors of math learning disability. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20, 142-155.
- McCook, J. E. (2006). *The RTI Guide: Developing and Implementing a Model in Your Schools*. Horsham, PA: LRP Publications.
- McIntyre, Tom (1996). "Does the way we teach create behavior disorders in culturally different students?" *Education and Treatment of Children*, 19, 354 -370.
- McKenzie, R.G. (2009). "Obscuring vital distinctions: The oversimplification of Learning Disabilities within RTI." *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 32, 203 – 215.
- Meltzer, L. and Krishnan, L. (2007). "Executive function difficulties and learning disabilities: Understandings and misunderstandings." In L. Meltzer (Ed.) *Executive Function in Education: From Theory to Practice* (pp. 77-105). NY: Guilford.
- Moats, L. C. (1999). *Teaching reading IS rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers.
- Nation, K. (2005). Children's reading comprehension difficulties. In M. J. Snowling & C. Hulme (Eds.), *The science of reading: A handbook* (pp. 248-266). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2000). *Curriculum and evaluation standards for school mathematics*. (2000). Reston, VA: Author.
- National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). *Developing early literacy: The report of the National Early Literacy Panel*. Jessup, MD: National Institute for Literacy.
- National Mathematics Advisory Panel. (2008). *Foundations for success: The final report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health.
- Nelson, J. R., Benner, G. J., and Gonzalez, J. (2003). Learner characteristics that influence the treatment effectiveness of early literacy interventions: A meta-analytic review. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 18, 255-267.
- Ofesh, N. (2006). Response to intervention and the identification of specific learning disabilities: Why we need comprehensive evaluations as part of the process. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43, 883-888.
- Peverly, S.T. (2006). The importance of handwriting speed in adult writing. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 29, 197-216.

## References

- Peverly, S. T. and Kitzen, K. R. (1998). Curriculum-based assessment of reading skills: Considerations and caveats for school psychologists. *Psychology in the Schools*, 35, 29-47.
- President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. (2002). *A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and their families*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education.
- Pufpaff, L. A. (2009). A developmental continuum of phonological sensitivity skills. *Psychology in the Schools*, 46, 679-691.
- Reis, S. M. and Colbert, R. (2004). "Counseling needs of academically talented students with learning disabilities." *Professional School Counseling Journal*, 8, 156-167.
- Reis, S.M.; Neu, T.W. and McGuire, J.M. (1995). *Talents in two places: Case studies of high ability students with learning disabilities who have achieved* (Research Monograph No. 95114). Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.
- Reeves, D. B. (2002). *Making standards work* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Denver, CO: Advanced Learning Press.
- Riedel, B. W. (2007). The relation between DIBELS, reading comprehension, and vocabulary in urban first-grade students. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 42, 546-567.
- Rocklin Unified School District, 48 IDELR ¶ 201 (Cal. SEA 2007).
- Rourke, B.P. (2005). Neuropsychology of learning disabilities: Past and future. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 28, 111-114.
- Salvia, J. and Ysseldyke, J. (2004). *Assessment in special and inclusive education, ninth edition*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Scarborough, H. S. (2002). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 97-125). New York: Guilford Press.
- Scott, C., and Windsor, J. (2000). General language performance measures in spoken and written discourse produced by school-age children with and without language learning disabilities. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 43, 324-339.
- Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., and Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. (Monographs of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.
- Shanahan, T. (2002). Connecting reading and writing instruction for struggling learners. In G. A. Troia (Ed.), *Instruction and Assessment for Struggling Writers: Evidence-Based Practices* (pp. 113-131). NY: The Guilford Press.
- Share, D.L. and Stanovich, K.E. (1995). Cognitive processes in early reading development: Accommodating individual differences into a model of acquisition. *Issues in Education: Contributions from Educational Psychology*, 1, 1-57.
- Shaw, S.F.; Keenan, W.R.; Madaus, J.W. and Banerjee, M. (2010). "Disability documentation, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, and the Summary of Performance: How are they linked?" *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 22, 142-150.
- Shaywitz, S. (2003). Overcoming dyslexia: A new and complete science-based program for read-



- ing problems at any level. New York: Knopf.
- Simonsen, B.; Fairbanks, S.; Briesch, A.; Myers, D. and Sugai, G. (2008). "Evidence-based practices in classroom management: Considerations for research to practice." *Education and Treatment of Children*, 31, 351-380.
- Spear-Swerling, L. (2004a). A road map for understanding reading disability and other reading problems: Origins, intervention, and prevention. In R. Ruddell and N. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading*, vol. 5. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Spear-Swerling, L. (2004b). Fourth-graders' performance on a state-mandated assessment involving two different measures of reading comprehension. *Reading Psychology*, 25, 121-148.
- Spear-Swerling, L. (2010). Patterns of reading disabilities across development. In R. Allington & A. McGill-Franzen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on reading disabilities*. New York: Routledge.
- Speece, D. L., Case, L. P., and Molloy, D. W. (2003). Responsiveness to general education instruction as the first gate to learning disabilities identification. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 18, 147-156.
- Stanovich, K. E. (2000). *Progress in understanding reading: Scientific foundations and new frontiers*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Stewart, R. M.; Benner, G. J.; Matella, R. C. and Marchand-Martella, N. E. (2007). Three-tier models of reading and behavior: A research review. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 9, 239-253.
- Swanson, H. L. (2009). What about Bob or IQ and LD? *New Times for DLD*, 27, 1-2.
- Swanson, H.L. and Beebe-Frankenberger, M. (2004). The relationship between working memory and mathematical problem solving in children at risk and not at risk for serious math difficulties. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96, 471-491.
- Thomson, J. M.; Goswami, U. (2010). Learning novel phonological representation in developmental dyslexia: Associations with basic auditory processing of rise time and phonological awareness. *Reading and Writing*, 23, 453-473.
- Torgesen, J. K. (2001). The theory and practice of intervention: Comparing outcomes from prevention and remediation studies. In A. J. Fawcett (Ed.), *Dyslexia: Theory and good practice* (pp. 185-202). London: Whurr Publishers.
- Torgesen, J.K. (2002). "Empirical and theoretical support for direct diagnosis of learning disabilities by assessment of intrinsic processing weaknesses." In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, and D. Hallahan. (Eds.). (pp. 563-613). *Identification of Learning Disabilities: Research to Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Torgesen, J.K., Wagner, R.K., Rashotte, C.A., Rose, E., Lindamood, P., Conway, T., and Garvan, C. (1999). Preventing reading failure in young children with phonological processing disabilities: Group and individual responses to instruction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91, 579-593.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2007). "Building the legacy: IDEA 2004, Alignment with the

## References

- No Child Left Behind Act.” Retrieved August 30, 2008, from: <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C3%2C>.
- U. S. Department of Education. (2003). *Identifying and implementing educational practices supported by rigorous evidence: A user-friendly guide*. Washington, DC: Author. Available online at <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousetid/index.html>.
- Vaughn, S., Levy, S., Coleman, M., and Bos, C. (2002). Reading instruction for students with LD and EBD. *Journal of Special Education*, 36, 2-13.
- Vellutino, F. R., and Scanlon, D. M. (2002). Emergent literacy skills, early instruction, and individual differences as determinants of difficulties in learning to read: The case for early intervention. In S. B. Neuman and D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 295-321). New York: Guilford Press.
- Wolf, M., and Katzir-Cohen, T. (2001). Reading fluency and its intervention. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 5, 211-238.
- Wright, J. (2007). *RTI Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Schools*. Port Chester, NY: National Professional Resources, Inc.
- Zelazo, P., Carter, A., Reznick, J., and Freye, D. (1997). Early development of executive function: A problem-solving framework. *Review of General Psychology*, 1, 198-226.
- Zirkel, P.A. and Rose, T. (2009). “Scientifically based research and peer-reviewed research under the IDEA: The legal definitions, applications, and implications.” *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 22, 36 – 50.

# **Appendix A: Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report Form**

All worksheets may be found in PDF and Word formats on the Department's Web site:  
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&Q=320730#IEP>.

[District Name] Public Schools  
Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report for  
Students Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Report: \_\_\_\_\_

The following information must be reviewed by the Planning and Placement Team and documented in the appropriate spaces.

**I. Required Evaluation Components**

**A. Parental Input:**

---

---

---

---

---

**B. Interventions and Instructional Strategies Used Prior to Referral:**

[All student-centered intervention and progress monitoring data is attached, including information from math, reading, and/or writing worksheets, as appropriate. Data should include implementers and dates of progress monitoring.]

**C. Educationally Relevant Medical Findings, if any:**  N/A

---

---

---

---

**D. Regular Classroom Observation: Area of Difficulty:**

Academic setting: \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Observer(s) : \_\_\_\_\_  
Behavior observed and the relationship to academic functioning: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

**E. Assessment Information:**

<u>Assessment</u> (e.g., curriculum-based, standardized, criterion-referenced)	<u>Evaluator (Name and Title)</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

II. Criteria Respond to each criteria used to determine eligibility for students suspected of having a specific learning disability.			Criteria Met	
			YES	NO
<b>A.</b> Is student achieving adequately for the student’s age or meeting State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the student’s age or State-approved grade level standards? If NO, indicate in which area(s) student is NOT achieving adequately below:  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>[Note: At least <u>one</u> area must be identified.]</i></p> <input type="checkbox"/> mathematics calculation <input type="checkbox"/> mathematics problem solving <input type="checkbox"/> oral expression <input type="checkbox"/> written expression <input type="checkbox"/> listening comprehension <input type="checkbox"/> reading comprehension <input type="checkbox"/> fluency <input type="checkbox"/> basic reading skills				*
<b>B.</b> Is student making sufficient progress <b>in the area identified above</b> to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards, even with scientific research-based interventions?				*
<b>C.</b> The student has been provided with explicit and systematic instruction in the essential components of scientific, research-based reading instruction or math from a qualified teacher, including regular assessments of achievement to document the student’s response to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures.			*	
<b>D.</b> Learning difficulty is <i>primarily</i> due to:			YES	NO
1. Lack of instruction in math, reading or writing <sup>o</sup> ( <i>Based on Math, Reading or Writing Worksheets</i> )				
2. A visual, hearing or motor disability				
3. Intellectual Disability				
4. Emotional Disturbance				
5. Cultural factors				
6. Environmental or economic disadvantage				
7. Limited English proficiency				
			Note: If all of the (✓)’s are in the NO column, then the student meets the criteria for II D (i.e., “learning difficulty is NOT the result of” these other factors).	
<b>E.</b> Has <b>NO</b> been (✓)’d for <b>all</b> items in D above (#1-7)?				
<b>F.</b> Does information gathered through the <b>required evaluation components</b> (including consideration of a dual discrepancy**) indicate that a specific learning disability exists in the <b>area identified above</b> (in A)? - If a specific learning disability exists in <b>one of the eight areas above</b> (in II A), <b>attach</b> a summary statement of all formal and informal assessment data used to document the existence of such a disability.				
<b>G.</b> Are special education and related services required to address the specific learning disability identified in II F?				

**\*Criteria A-C:** The student has been provided with scientific, research-based interventions in area of concern and repeated measures of progress were utilized to determine the student’s response to the intervention(s).

**°Criteria D-1:** Math, Reading and/or Writing Worksheets are attached (unless math, reading and/or writing are not an area of weakness).

**\*\*Dual Discrepancy:** Dual discrepancy means that a student has BOTH low performance relative to age or grade level standards AND insufficient progress even when provided with scientific, research-based interventions.

**Statements of Assurances:**

H. Data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction (i.e., progress monitoring) has been provided to parents.

Date(s) information provided: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Student's parents were notified about state policies for performance, strategies for increasing the student's rate of learning and parent's right to request an evaluation.

Date(s) information provided: \_\_\_\_\_

J. The IQ/discrepancy (ability/achievement) model was not used to determine eligibility.

K. A disorder in one of the basic psychological processes in understanding or in using spoken or written language was not **required** as part of the eligibility decision.

**The Planning and Placement Team has reviewed the information presented and has made the determination that the student has a specific learning disability and requires special education services:**

**YES** [All criteria (A-G) have been met.]  **NO**

Each team member certifies by his/her signature that this report reflects her/his conclusion. (**Bold** means required.)

Signature

Title

_____	<b>General education teacher</b> _____
_____	<b>Examiner/special education instruction</b> _____
_____	<b>Examiner/pupil personnel services</b> _____
_____	<b>Administrator</b> _____
_____	Other _____
_____	Other _____

**If this report does not reflect a team member's conclusion s/he must indicate below her/his reasons and conclusion.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reason(s) and conclusion:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[District Name] Public Schools Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report for Students Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Report: \_\_\_\_\_

The following information must be reviewed by the Planning and Placement Team and documented in the appropriate spaces.

**I. Required Evaluation Components**

**A. Parental Input:**

**B. Interventions and Instructional Strategies Used Prior to Referral:**

[All student-centered intervention and progress monitoring data is attached, including information from math, reading, and/or writing worksheets, as appropriate. Data should include implementers and dates of progress monitoring.]

**C. Educationally Relevant Medical Findings, if any:**  N/A

**D. Regular Classroom Observation: Area of Difficulty -** \_\_\_\_\_

Academic setting: \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Observer(s) : \_\_\_\_\_

Behavior observed and the relationship to academic functioning: \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Assessment Information:**

Assessment

Evaluator (Name and Title)

(e.g., curriculum-based, standardized, criterion-referenced)

**II. Criteria**

Respond to each criteria used to determine eligibility for students suspected of having a specific learning disability.

**Criteria Met**

**YES NO**

**A.** Is student achieving adequately for the student's age or meeting State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas when provided with learning experiences appropriate for the student's age or State-approved grade level standards? If NO, indicate in which area(s) student is NOT achieving adequately below:

[Note: At least one area must be identified.]

- mathematics calculation       mathematics problem solving       oral expression       written expression
- listening comprehension       reading comprehension       fluency       basic reading skills

**B.** Is student making sufficient progress in the area identified above to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards, even with scientific research-based interventions?

\*

\*

**C.** The student has been provided with explicit and systematic instruction in the essential components of scientific, research-based reading instruction or math from a qualified teacher, including regular assessments of achievement to document the student's response to scientific research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures.

	YES	NO	Note: If all of the (✓)'s are in the NO column, then the student meets the criteria for II D (i.e., "learning difficulty is NOT the result of" these other factors).
<b>D.</b> Learning difficulty is <i>primarily</i> due to:			
1. Lack of instruction in math, reading or writing° ( <i>Based on Math, Reading or Writing Worksheets</i> )			
2. A visual, hearing or motor disability			
3. Intellectual Disability			
4. Emotional Disturbance			
5. Cultural factors			
6. Environmental or economic disadvantage			
7. Limited English proficiency			
<b>E.</b> Has <b>NO</b> been (✓)'d for <b>all</b> items in D above (#1-7)?			
<b>F.</b> Does information gathered through the <b>required evaluation components</b> (including consideration of a dual discrepancy**) indicate that a specific learning disability exists in the <b>area identified above</b> (in A)? – If a specific learning disability exists in <b>one of the eight areas above</b> (in II A), <b>attach</b> a summary statement of all formal and informal assessment data used to document the existence of such a disability.			
<b>G.</b> Are special education and related services required to address the specific learning disability identified in F?			

**\*Criteria A-C:** The student has been provided with scientific, research-based interventions in area of concern and repeated measures of progress were utilized to determine the student's response to the intervention(s).

°**Criteria D-1:** Math, Reading and/or Writing Worksheets are attached (unless math, reading and/or writing are not an area of weakness)

\*\***Dual Discrepancy:** Dual discrepancy means that a student has BOTH low performance relative to age or grade level standards AND insufficient progress even when provided with scientific, research-based interventions.

**Statements of Assurances:**

**H.** Data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, reflecting formal assessment of student progress during instruction (i.e., progress monitoring) has been provided to parents.  
Date(s) information provided: \_\_\_\_\_

**I.** Student's parents were notified about state policies for performance, strategies for increasing the student's rate of learning and parent's right to request an evaluation.  
Date(s) information provided: \_\_\_\_\_

**J.** The IQ/discrepancy (ability/achievement) model was not used to determine eligibility.

**K.** A disorder in one of the basic psychological processes in understanding or in using spoken or written language was not **required** as part of the eligibility decision.

**The Planning and Placement Team has reviewed the information presented and has made the determination that the student has a specific learning disability and requires special education services:**  YES [All criteria (A-G) have been met.]  NO

Each team member certifies by his/her signature that this report reflects her/his conclusion. (**Bold** means required.)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Signature</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Title</b></p> <p>General education teacher _____</p> <p>Examiner/special education instruction _____</p> <p>Examiner/pupil personnel services _____</p> <p>Administrator _____</p> <p>Other _____</p> <p>Other _____</p>
---	--

**If this report does not reflect a team member's conclusion s/he must indicate below her/his reasons and conclusion.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason(s) and conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix B: Worksheets to Document Appropriate Instruction in Reading, Mathematics, and/or Written Expression**

All worksheets may be found in PDF and Word formats on the Department's Web site:  
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&Q=320730#IEP>.

[District Name] Public Schools

Reading Worksheet

(To document that a student has received appropriate instruction and intervention in reading)

This checklist must be completed for all elementary, middle, and high school students who have been referred to special education due to a suspected learning disability that affects reading. This information should generally be gathered prior to a referral to special education as part of early intervention (i.e., alternative procedures required to be implemented in regular education under CT Special Education Regulations §10-76d-7). (All boxes must be checked with appropriate documentation provided.)

1. Core General Education Language Arts Instruction (Tier I)

- Student has participated in daily general education reading/language arts instruction using scientific research-based practices provided to the entire class by the general education teacher.

Description of Instruction Provided: General education instruction should involve a comprehensive, district-wide reading curriculum that addresses state standards and the five areas of reading (e.g., through read-alouds; systematic phonics instruction; word study and structural analysis; fluency-building activities; explicit vocabulary instruction; literature think-alouds; comprehension strategy instruction):

Empty box for description of instruction provided.

2. Small Group/Differentiated Instruction by General Education Teacher (Tier I)

- Student has participated in small group, differentiated reading instruction by the classroom teacher as part of Tier I general education instruction (i.e., for all students). Materials at the student’s instructional level (90-95% word accuracy and at least 75-80% comprehension) have been used for a minimum of four days per week.

Description –How Core Curriculum was Differentiated to Meet Individual Student Needs in Small Group Setting:

Empty box for description of differentiated instruction.

3. Progress Monitoring Assessments (Tier I)

- Continuous progress monitoring has been provided to establish a basis for instructional decisions and to document a student’s response to instruction.

Description/Source of Evidence of Progress Monitoring: Results attached

Table with 3 columns: Assessment, Skills/Competencies Targeted, Dates. Includes headers and empty rows for data entry.

4. Supplemental scientific research-based interventions (Tier II – targeted interventions; Tier III - more targeted and intensive interventions)

- Interventions have been implemented based on specific student needs in one or more of the five areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and/or comprehension.
Appropriately qualified and trained staff has provided the interventions, which have been implemented with fidelity (i.e., delivered in the manner in which they were designed and intended to be used). Documentation indicating frequency, duration and type of intervention is either listed on this form or attached.

**a. If decoding skills have been identified as an area of weakness:**

- Student’s phonemic awareness has been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided.
- Student has been provided with systematic, explicit phonics instruction.
- Student has been provided with regular opportunities to practice learned decoding skills in texts.
- Teacher** has systematically collected progress monitoring data, using valid and reliable measures, to determine the student’s response to the interventions provided.

**b. If a student’s oral reading fluency has been identified as an area of weakness:**

- Student’s phonics skills have been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided.
- Student has been provided with regular opportunities to practice reading a variety of text at his/her independent level (at least 96% word accuracy and 90% comprehension).
- Student has been provided with teacher-directed fluency interventions focused specifically on improving oral reading fluency with connected text.
- Teacher** has systematically collected progress monitoring data, using valid and reliable measures, to determine the student’s response to the interventions provided.

**c. If a student’s reading comprehension skills have been identified as an area of weakness beyond what can be accounted for by identified decoding and/or reading fluency deficits:**

- Student’s vocabulary skills have been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided, with application to reading comprehension.
- Student’s broad oral language skills (e.g., listening comprehension) have been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided, with application to reading comprehension.
- Student has been provided with explicit comprehension interventions (e.g., additional instruction in research-based comprehension strategies such as summarization and use of graphic organizers; additional building of background knowledge and/or knowledge of text structure) to address his/her specific comprehension needs.
- Teacher** has systematically collected progress monitoring data, using valid and reliable measures, to determine the student’s response to the interventions provided.

**5. Lack of sufficient progress to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards (Tiers II/III)**

- The student has not made sufficient progress in the supplemental intervention(s) implemented above despite attempts to improve, individualize and intensify the intervention.

**Source of Evidence:** Attach teacher support and/or intervention team information (including data in numeric and graphic formats) **AND** complete chart below

<b>Scientific research-based interventions used as supplemental and/or intensive interventions.</b> These interventions are in addition to what is provided for all students (i.e., Tier I)	<b>Student’s response to interventions</b> Baseline plus at least four additional progress monitoring measurements for each intervention (CBM or other appropriate measure)	<b>Dates</b> of intervention implementation

NOTE: Please see 2010 *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* for more information regarding instructions on completing the worksheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Teacher signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature of person(s) responsible for item #5) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

**[District Name] Public Schools  
Mathematics Worksheet**

(To document that a student has received appropriate instruction and intervention in mathematics)

This checklist must be completed for all elementary, middle, and high school students who have been referred to special education due to a suspected learning disability that affects mathematics. This information should generally be gathered prior to a referral to special education as part of early intervention (i.e., alternative procedures required to be implemented in regular education under CT Special Education Regulations §10-76d-7). *(All boxes must be checked with appropriate documentation provided.)*

**1. Core General Education Mathematics Instruction (Tier I)**

- Student has participated in daily general education mathematics instruction using scientific research-based practices provided to the entire class by the general education teacher.

**Description of Instruction Provided:** General education instruction should involve a comprehensive, district-wide math curriculum that addresses state standards and all important areas of math, (e.g., through the explicit teaching of strategies that promote conceptual understanding, problem-solving, calculation skills, and procedural accuracy and fluency):


**2. Small Group/Differentiated Instruction by General Education Teacher (Tier I)**

- Student has participated in small group, differentiated math instruction by the classroom teacher as part of Tier I general education instruction (i.e., for all students). Materials at the student’s instructional level have been used for a minimum of four days per week.

**Description –How Core Curriculum was Differentiated to Meet Individual Student Needs in Small Group Setting:**


**3. Progress Monitoring Assessments (Tier I)**

- Continuous progress monitoring has been provided to establish a basis for instructional decisions and to document a student’s response to instruction.

**Description/Source of Evidence of Progress Monitoring:**  **Results attached**

Assessment (e.g., curriculum based measurement, curriculum-based assessments, diagnostic assessments)	Skills/Competencies Targeted (e.g., math concepts, problem solving, calculation skills, procedural accuracy and fluency)	Dates

**4. Supplemental scientific research-based interventions (Tier II – targeted interventions; Tier III - more targeted and intensive interventions)**

- Interventions have been implemented** based on specific student needs in important areas of math such as math concepts, problem solving, calculation skills or procedural accuracy and fluency.
- Appropriately qualified and trained staff have provided the interventions, which have been implemented with fidelity (i.e., delivered in the manner in which they were designed and intended to be used). Documentation indicating frequency, duration and type of intervention is either listed on this form or attached.

**a. If calculation skills have been identified as an area of weakness:**

- Student’s conceptual understanding of numbers has been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided (e.g., additional, more explicit instruction with use of visual representations such as pictures or manipulatives).
- Student’s automatic recall of facts has been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided.
- Student has been provided with explicit teaching of algorithms for calculation linking procedures to a conceptual understanding (e.g., written procedures for 2-digit subtraction with regrouping, long division).
- Student has been provided with regular opportunities to practice learned calculation skills in appropriate contexts, including cumulative review of previously learned skills.
  - Teacher** has systematically collected progress monitoring data, using valid and reliable measures, to determine the student’s response to the interventions provided.

**b. If problem-solving skills have been identified as an area of weakness beyond what can be accounted for by identified calculation deficits and/or poor reading:**

- Student’s math-related vocabulary and other oral language skills have been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided, with application to math problem solving.
- Student’s specific problem-solving skills (e.g., ability to determine which operation to use to solve a problem, identifying relevant vs. irrelevant information) have been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided.
- Student has been provided with regular opportunities to practice learned problem-solving skills, including cumulative review of previously learned skills.
  - Teacher** has systematically collected progress monitoring data, using valid and reliable measures, to determine the student’s response to the interventions provided.

**5. Lack of sufficient progress to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards (Tiers II/III)**

- The student has not made sufficient progress in the supplemental intervention(s) implemented above despite attempts to improve, individualize and intensify the intervention.

**Source of Evidence:** Attach teacher support and/or intervention team information (including data in numeric and graphic formats) **AND** complete chart below

<b>Scientific research-based interventions used as supplemental and/or intensive interventions.</b> These interventions are in addition to what is provided for all students (i.e., Tier I)	<b>Student’s response to interventions</b> Baseline plus at least four additional progress monitoring measurements for each intervention (Curriculum Based Measurement -CBM or other appropriate measure)	<b>Dates</b> of intervention implementation

NOTE: Please see 2010 *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* for more information regarding instructions on completing the worksheet.

\_\_\_\_\_

(Teacher signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of person(s) responsible for item #5)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)

**[District Name] Public Schools**  
**Written Expression Worksheet**

(To document that a student has received appropriate instruction and intervention in written expression)

This checklist must be completed for all elementary, middle, and high school students who have been referred to special education due to a suspected learning disability that affects written expression. This information should generally be gathered prior to a referral to special education as part of early intervention (i.e., alternative procedures required to be implemented in regular education under CT Special Education Regulations §10-76d-7). (All boxes must be checked with appropriate documentation provided.)

**1. Core General Education Written Expression Instruction (Tier I)**

- Student has participated in daily general education written expression instruction using scientific research-based practices provided to the entire class by the general education teacher.

**Description of Instruction Provided:** General education instruction should involve a comprehensive, district-wide writing curriculum that addresses state standards and all important areas of writing (e.g., through explicit teaching of basic writing skills, planning and organizational strategies, and writing knowledge; use of a writing process, with strategies for editing and revision; opportunities for practice; appropriate use of technology in writing; reading-writing connections):


**2. Small Group/Differentiated Instruction by General Education Teacher (Tier I)**

- Student has participated in small group, differentiated written expression instruction by the classroom teacher as part of Tier I general education instruction (i.e., for all students). Materials appropriate to the student’s instructional level have been used for a minimum of four days per week.

**Description –How Core Curriculum was Differentiated to Meet Individual Student Needs in Small Group Setting:**


**3. Progress Monitoring Assessments (Tier I)**

- Continuous progress monitoring has been provided to establish a basis for instructional decisions and to document a student’s response to instruction.

**Description/Source of Evidence of Progress Monitoring:**                       **Results attached**

Assessment (e.g., curriculum based measurement, curriculum-based assessments, diagnostic assessments)	Skills/Competencies Targeted (e.g., basic writing skills, planning, text generation/content development, revision)	Dates

**4. Supplemental scientific research-based interventions (Tier II – targeted interventions; Tier III - more targeted and intensive interventions)**

- Interventions have been implemented based on specific student needs in important areas of writing, such as basic writing skills, text generation, or revision/editing processes.
- Appropriately qualified and trained staff have provided the interventions, which have been implemented with fidelity (i.e., delivered in the manner in which they were designed and intended to be used). Documentation indicating frequency, duration and type of intervention is either listed on this form or attached.

**a. If basic writing skills have been identified as an area of weakness:**

- Student’s basic writing skills (e.g., handwriting/keyboarding, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure) have been evaluated and targeted interventions have been provided in specific areas of need.
- Student has been provided with appropriate access to and teaching about the use of technology in writing to improve basic writing skills (e.g., use of spell-checkers).
- Student has been taught strategies for reviewing and editing written work to improve basic writing skills.
- Student has been provided with regular opportunities to practice basic writing skills.
- Teacher** has systematically collected progress monitoring data, using valid and reliable measures, to determine the student’s response to the interventions provided.

**b. If text generation (i.e., content aspects of writing that involve translating ideas into language) has been identified as an area of weakness, beyond what can be accounted for by identified weaknesses in basic writing skills:**

- Student’s vocabulary and other oral language skills have been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided, with application to writing.
- Student’s ability to plan and organize writing have been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided (e.g., additional, more explicit teaching of strategies for brainstorming or researching ideas).
- Student’s knowledge about writing (e.g., writing for an intended audience, use of formal vs. informal language in writing, schemas for different writing tasks such as reports vs. narratives) has been evaluated and if warranted, targeted interventions have been provided.
- Student has been provided with appropriate access to and teaching about the use of technology in writing to improve text generation (e.g., use of online thesaurus to improve word choice/avoid repetition of the same word).
- Student has been taught strategies for reviewing and revising written work to improve content/text generation.
- Student has been provided with regular opportunities to practice text generation.
- Teacher** has systematically collected progress monitoring data, using valid and reliable measures, to determine the student’s response to the interventions provided.

**5. Lack of sufficient progress to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards (Tiers II/III)**

- The student has not made sufficient progress in the supplemental intervention(s) implemented above despite attempts to improve, individualize, and intensify the intervention.

**Source of Evidence:** Attach teacher support and/or intervention team information (including data in numeric and graphic formats) **AND** complete chart below

<b>Scientific research-based interventions used as supplemental and/or intensive interventions.</b> These interventions are in addition to what is provided for all students (i.e., Tier I)	<b>Student’s response to interventions</b> Baseline plus at least four additional progress monitoring measurements for each intervention (CBM or other appropriate measure)	<b>Dates</b> of intervention implementation

NOTE: Please see 2010 *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* for more information regarding instructions on completing the worksheet.

\_\_\_\_\_

(Teacher signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of person(s) responsible for item #5)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)

## **Appendix C: Written Mutual Agreement Form (ED 637)**

All worksheets may be found in PDF and Word formats on the Department's Web site:  
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&Q=320730#IEP>.



## Mutual Agreement to Extend Evaluation Timeline for Determining Special Education Eligibility for a Student with a Specific Learning Disability

**PURPOSE:** Unless the parent and the district mutually agree to extend the timeline as indicated in IDEA, (34 C.F.R. Section 300.309(c)), the initial evaluation must be conducted within 60 calendar days of receiving parental consent for the evaluation. If the district and parent agree to extend the timeline, the extension must be documented by the school district according to the criteria below.

**Please Note:** This agreement may affect the State timeline for IEP implementation within 45 school days of the referral (Section 10-76d-13 of the CT State Regulations). In these cases, this agreement permits an extension to this requirement as well.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

To: \_\_\_\_\_ Re: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent(s)/guardian(s)/adult student ( $\geq 18$ ) Student name

Due to the reason(s) specified below, your child's evaluation for special education services will not be completed within the evaluation timeline.

Reason(s):

Insufficient information to document that student's learning difficulties are not the result of a lack of appropriate instruction.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The evaluation will be completed and the PPT meeting to determine the child's eligibility for special education services will be held on or before:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

The evaluation timeline may be extended only if **both** the district and parent agree to the extension. Please sign, date, and return one copy of this form to the school district.

**I agree** to the extension and the proposed completion date indicated above.

**I do not agree** to the extension. Reason (optional): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/guardian/adult student signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
School district representative signature Date

# Appendix D: Policies Involving English Language Learners

## Connecticut Position Statement on the Education of Students Acquiring English as a Second Language Adopted January 3, 2001<sup>1</sup>

The mission of the Connecticut State Board of Education is to ensure “that each child shall have...equal opportunity to receive a suitable program of educational experiences,” as stated in Section 10-4a of the Connecticut General Statutes. To accomplish this mission, and to fulfill the requirements of Public Act No. 99-211, *An Act Improving Bilingual Education*<sup>2</sup>, for those students, prekindergarten to adult, who are acquiring English as a second language, the Board affirms that programs be provided in which such students will:

- as the primary goal, acquire a level of English proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing that will allow full participation in the mainstream academic program;
- master the same content and meet the same academic performance standards expected of students whose first language is English; and
- continue developing their native language and heritage as a goal that has value in its own right and in order to assist their overall language development and content learning in English.

Moreover, in a time of increasing economic globalization and international exchange, the State Board of Education maintains that the acquisition of more than one language by all students is in the best interest of the State of Connecticut. Therefore, it is the belief of the State Board of Education that:

- every student should attain writing and speaking competency in at least two languages;
- individuals competent in more than one language and knowledgeable about more than one culture are an essential asset to the state’s schools, communities and work force, and the national and international markets; and
- such individuals will be among those best suited to assume leadership and other important positions in the national and international markets.

At the same time, the State Board of Education recognizes that:

- second language learning and learning through a second language are demanding and complex enterprises that require considerable support;
- mastery of academic subject area content in English requires a high level of English proficiency;
- approaches that promote cognitive development in the student’s primary language as well as in English enhance student achievement;
- a suitable program of educational experiences for all students acquiring English as a second language must include a full academic program of study presented in an understandable way utilizing a rigorous sequence of English language and literacy development; and
- the number and concentrations of linguistic groups needing services will determine the

types of programs that a school district must provide, including programs of bilingual education as required by Section 10-17f of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended by Public Act No. 99-211.

Accordingly, local school districts with students acquiring English as a second language have the responsibility to:

- identify and serve every student who needs to acquire English as a second language for communicative and academic learning purposes;
  - employ qualified teachers of English as a second language and provide all-English speaking classroom teachers with professional development in rendering content area instruction understandable for students acquiring English as a second language;
  - ensure that lack of English competency does not result in the exclusion of students from appropriate academic and nonacademic activities; and
  - keep abreast of national and international research and best practices for educating students acquiring English as a second language.
- In addition, local school districts required to provide programs of bilingual education must:
- establish for eligible students programs that: make instructional use of both English and their native language; enable such students to achieve English proficiency and academic mastery of subject matter content and higher order thinking skills; and provide for the continuous increase in the use of English and corresponding decrease in the use of the native language for purposes of instruction;
  - employ bilingual education teachers proficient in English and at least one other language in both written and oral formats and, as appropriate, English as a second language (ESL) teachers and all-English speaking classroom teachers skilled in assisting eligible students in developing content area mastery in English;
  - establish clear procedures for placing eligible students in the language program selected by their parents or guardians and for exiting students from required bilingual education programs according to established standards and criteria;
  - ensure through the annual assessment that eligible students are making sufficient linguistic and academic progress toward meeting the state English mastery standard and, where they are not, provide them with the required language support services, identified in consultation with their parents or guardians, that will enable them to do so;
  - ensure that eligible students who do not meet the state English mastery standard after thirty months in a required bilingual education program receive appropriate language transition support services and make sufficient progress toward meeting the standard on the required annual assessment;
  - assess the effectiveness of required programs of bilingual education through the annual program evaluation and prescribed measures of effectiveness;
  - make every effort to allow eligible students and their English-proficient counterparts to be sources of cultural enrichment to one another; and
  - orient the parents of eligible students in supporting the linguistic and academic development of their children.

Finally, local school districts may include the development of native language skills of eligible students and the participation of English-proficient students in required programs of bilingual

education.

The Board strongly believes that this position statement appropriately addresses the education of students acquiring English as a second language and enhances our new vision of the strength that multilingualism holds for all students in the State of Connecticut.

Statutory requirements for educating English language learners (ELLs) not served in required programs of bilingual education

ELL students for whom a bilingual education program is not available or whose parents have opted the student out of the program should be offered the type of English as a second language program that is defined by Section 10-17 e-j inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes (i.e., a program that uses English as the instructional language and that enables students to achieve English proficiency and academic mastery of subject matter content). This means assisting ELL students in developing speaking proficiency and literacy in English and in mastering the same academic content required of all other students (e.g., language arts, literature, mathematics, science and social studies). Pursuing academic studies in English requires a high degree of proficiency and literacy in the language. Acquiring such proficiency takes time and rigorous study. As ESL program students progress in English acquisition, they are introduced to greater amounts of academic content (i.e., academic studies follow closely upon acquisition of the language in which they are taught). The most common approach used by teachers experienced in educating this population is the “sheltered” content teaching approach. Teachers who use this approach modify their instruction to render it understandable or comprehensible to students. They do this by speaking at a level of English the students can comprehend, by assisting students in acquiring the academic language of the various content areas, and by providing the students with many “contextual clues” regarding the meaning of what is taught. Teachers commonly use such contextual clues as pictures, manipulates, body language and gestures, and hands-on teaching activities to make what they are teaching understandable to students who are concurrently in the process of acquiring English as a second or additional language.

For ELL students to have “meaningful access to the school’s program,” it would seem reasonable to provide them with an opportunity to develop English proficiency and literacy over time through a well-executed ESL program and with the necessary modifications and supports that will enable them to achieve academically through English.

Statutory Requirements for Language Transition Support Services (LTSS)

In June 1999, the Connecticut General Assembly revised the State’s bilingual education statute. Among the provisions of Section 10-17 e-j, inclusive, of the Connecticut General Statutes are the following:

- the tenure of students in required bilingual education programs is limited to 30 months;
- program students must be assessed annually in English for growth in language proficiency and academic achievement;<sup>3</sup>
- program students must meet the English mastery standard (established in 1999-2000); and
- students who have not met this standard at the end of 30 months must be provided with LTSS.

Students in LTSS must be assessed annually until they meet the English mastery standard. Upon meeting the standard, students will no longer qualify for LTSS. (See Guidelines for Implementing Language Transition Support Services (LTSS) (2002) at: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=321092>)

The following points require emphasis:

- LTSS are a shared responsibility of general education, bilingual education and ESL teachers and administrators;

- LTSS must address individual student needs;
- each student’s English language acquisition stage needs to be considered when deciding appropriate services;
- closing the achievement gap benefits the entire school district; and
- overall effectiveness of LTSS is a districtwide and schoolwide responsibility.
- LTSS will serve as a strong bridge or transition from the bilingual education program to the general education program to the extent that they address individual student needs, are aligned with the district’s curriculum, and challenge each student to further learning in an enriched, supportive environment.

- 
1. This Position Statement has been revised and will be posted pending approval by the State Board of Education at: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2683&q=320314>
  2. Revised Questions and Answers: The Bilingual Education Statute will be posted pending approval at: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=320848>
  3. English proficiency for Grades K-12 is tested with the LAS Links; academic achievement is tested with the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 for Grades K-2 and with the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) for Grades 3-12. (For more information, see: <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/cedar/assessment/ell/resources/standards%20to%20exit%20ELL%20November%202007.pdf>)

# Appendix E: Instructional Models for English Language Learners (ELLs)

**Bilingual Education:** an educational program in which two languages are used to provide content matter instruction.

**Dual Language Program/Two-Way Language Program:** Also known as two-way immersion or two-way bilingual education. The goal of these bilingual programs is for students to develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language in a classroom that is usually composed of half native English speakers and half native speakers of the other language.

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** a program that uses only English as the instructional language for eligible students and enables such students to achieve English proficiency and academic mastery of subject matter content and higher order skills, including critical thinking, so as to meet appropriate grade promotion and graduation requirements. These programs models may be pull-out or push-in. Sometimes referred to as English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

**Language Transition Support Services (LTSS):** instructional services required for students who have exited a program of bilingual education after 30 months in Connecticut without having met the English mastery standard on the state annual assessments. The purpose of LTSS is to enable these students to achieve the mastery standard and to function successfully in the regular education classroom. Services consist primarily of continued English language and literacy development, as well as content-area instruction, with modifications and support that facilitate English language learners' learning.

**Sheltered English Instruction:** an instructional approach used to make academic instruction in English understandable to ELL students to help them acquire proficiency in English while at the same time achieve in content areas. In the sheltered classroom, teachers use physical activities, visual aids, and the environment to teach vocabulary for concept development in mathematics, science, social studies and other subjects. English language learners receive core curriculum instruction through the use of modified English and scaffold learning activities to ensure that material is comprehensible and students have an opportunity to achieve standards at grade level.

**Transitional bilingual education (TBE):** An educational program in which English language learners are taught through two languages—English and their native language—and English is taught as a second language. English language skills, grade promotion and graduation requirements are emphasized and the native language is used as a tool to learn content. The primary purpose of these programs is to facilitate the English language learners' transition to an all-English instructional environment while receiving academic subject instruction in the native language to the extent necessary. As proficiency in English increases, instruction through the native language decreases.

# Glossary

**\*aimline:** graphically, this is the line connecting the student's baseline performance level, the date to the student's year-end performance level goal and the date of that year-end goal. This line represents the expected rate of student progress over time. Sometimes referred to as a **goal line**.

**benchmark:** a description of a specific level of student achievement expected of students at particular ages, grades, developmental levels, or during a specific point in the school year.

**best practice:** a technique or methodology that has been proven to reliably lead to a desired result through research and experience.

**common assessments:** a broad term for assessments that are given routinely to all students in a grade and/or content area and that are the same for all students in a grade or course. Common assessments may be summative or formative.

**common formative assessments (CFA):** assessments that are the same across a grade level and/or content area, are used to inform and adjust instruction, and are not used to evaluate student progress for a grade.

**Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI):** is a statewide model of continuous school and district improvement with the goal of closing Connecticut's achievement gaps.

**\*Criterion-Referenced Assessment:** Assessments that measure what a student understands, knows or can accomplish in relation to a specific performance objective. These assessments are typically used to identify a student's specific strengths and weaknesses in relation to an age or grade-level standard. It does not compare students to other students.

**\*Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM):** an approach to measurement that is used to screen students or to monitor student progress in math, reading, writing and spelling. CBM is used to assess a students' responsiveness to instruction, using standardized measures demonstrated reliability and validity and using alternate forms of equivalent difficulty at different measurement points.

**data teams:** teams of educators that participate in collaborative, structured, scheduled meetings, which focus on the effectiveness of teaching as determined by student achievement. Data Teams adhere to continuous improvement cycles, analyze trends and determine strategies to facilitate analysis that results in action. Data Teams can occur at the state, district, school and instructional level.

**differentiated instruction (DI):** an approach to teaching that emphasizes ways to meet the differing needs and learning styles of students within the general education setting; for example, through the use of flexible small groups, different instructional materials or different ways of presenting the same content.

**English language learners (ELLs):** please see *Limited English Proficient*.

**\*evidence-based practice:** Evidence-based practices are educational practices and instructional strategies that are supported by scientific research and/or technically adequate district, school and individual student data.

**fidelity of implementation:** use and delivery of curricula, instructional strategies, behavioral systems and interventions in the manner they were designed and intended to be used (e.g., adhering to the treatment time and key features required for a particular intervention).

**formative assessment:** form of evaluation used by teachers to determine how to adjust instruction in response to student needs. With formative assessment, student progress is systematically assessed to provide continuous feedback to both the student and the teacher concerning learning successes and challenges. Formative assessments are used to inform and adjust instruction and are not used to evaluate student progress for a grade.

\***goal line:** see aimline.

**grade-level expectations (GLE):** a description of what students should know and be able to do at the end of a grade level.

**Limited English Proficient (federal term, CT-ELL):** the identification given to students who score below proficiency on Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links reading and writing.

\***progress monitoring:** regularly using data to track students' progress toward a goal, or a school or district's progress toward a goal for increased student achievement. Progress monitoring can be used to assess students' academic performance, to quantify a student rate of improvement and to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction.

**Response to Intervention (RTI):** please see Scientific Research-Based Interventions.

**school climate:** the nature of the interrelationships among people in the school community physically, emotionally and intellectually; how the people within the school community treat one another (adult to adult interactions, adult to student interactions and student to student interactions) through their actions, verbal and non-verbal exchanges, tone of voice and the use/abuse of inherent power advantages.

**scientific research-based:** practices informed by scientific studies that are peer reviewed, that is, examined by scientific experts on the topic of the study prior to its publication; that include experimental control of important extraneous variables such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age; and that use technically adequate (e.g., reliable and valid) measures. Ideally, studies that involve well-implemented, randomized controlled trials – studies that randomly assign participants to different experimental conditions in order to ensure that a sample is not biased.

**scientific research-based interventions (SRBI):** the use of educational practices, which have been validated through research as effective, for improved student outcomes. Educational practices that are implemented in a school or district which, through data analysis, demonstrate effectiveness (also known as Response to Intervention).

**screening:** See Universal Screening.

**slope:** a student's rate of improvement. Slope is determined by how the student is responding to the intervention.

\***students at risk:** In the Scientific Research-Based Interventions framework, students whose initial performance level and date of that initial performance level or characteristics predict poor learning outcomes unless intervention occurs to accelerate knowledge, skill or ability development.

**summative assessment:** assessment that is employed mainly to assess cumulative student learn-



ing at a particular point in time (e.g., the Connecticut Mastery Test, the Connecticut Academic Performance Test).

**tier I in scientific research-based interventions:** the on-going general education core curriculum, instruction and social/behavioral supports for all students, with adequate differentiation of instruction.

**tier II in scientific research-based interventions:** short-term (e.g., 8 – 20 weeks) interventions for struggling students who have not responded adequately to the Tier I core curriculum and differentiation of instruction; it is part of the general education system. Tier II instructional interventions should occur in 30-45 minute sessions 3-4 times a week with a maximum teacher- student ratio of 1:6. Student progress should be assessed weekly or biweekly.

**tier III in scientific research-based interventions:** more intensive or individualized short-term (e.g., 8 – 20 weeks) interventions for students who fail to respond adequately to the Tier I core curriculum and differentiation of instruction; it is part of the general education system. Tier III instructional interventions should occur for an hour each day with more frequent assessments than in Tier II and a maximum teacher-student ratio of 1:3.

**\*trend line:** the single line of best fit when the student's successive scores during intervention are plotted on a graph; the slope of the trend line shows the student's rate of improvement and can be compared to the Goal Line to help interpret responsiveness to intervention and inform instructional adjustments.

**\*universal screening:** usually as a first stage of a screening process, universal screening is conducted to identify or predict students who may be at risk for poor learning outcomes. Universal screening tests are typically brief, conducted with all students at a grade level and followed by additional testing or short-term progress monitoring to corroborate students' risk status.

**\*These entries are based on information from the *RTI Glossary of Terms and Definitions* published by the National Center on Response to Intervention. For more information, visit [www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org).**

## STATE OF CONNECTICUT

M. Jodi Rell, Governor

## STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Allan B. Taylor, Chairperson  
Janet M. Finneran, Vice Chairperson  
Beverly R. Bobroske  
Patrick Campbell  
Lynne S. Farrell  
William Fritz  
Theresa Hopkins-Staton  
Patricia B. Luke  
Neha Mehta  
Pamela Partridge West  
John H. Voss

Michael P. Meotti (ex officio)  
Commissioner of Higher Education

Mark K. McQuillan  
Commissioner of Education

The State of Connecticut Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons and does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, religion or any other basis prohibited by Connecticut state and/or federal nondiscrimination laws. Inquiries regarding the Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to the Equal Employment Opportunity Director, State of Connecticut Department of Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457-1543, 860-807-2071.