

Identifying Learning Disabilities in the School Setting

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Parents have probably noticed an increase in school assessments over the past few years. Progress monitoring allows for differentiated instruction; that is, students who are exceeding expectations receive more challenges and those who are below expectations obtain additional assistance.



The advantage to more frequent assessment is the schools' ability to identify struggling learners early and to offer corrective interventions rather than "waiting for failure" to implement intensive plans and accommodations.

A child who is struggling will receive specific interventions implemented by general education teachers or interventionists. Subsequently, rather than a "general education" vs. "special education" model, students have a continuum of interventions available, with special education services occurring at the far end of the continuum.

Parents should be notified and involved in planning meetings (often called "Response to Intervention/Instruction" or "Problem Solving" Teams) if a child is receiving general education interventions that are not provided to all other students. When this occurs, the child should have more frequent monitoring of his/her progress with this intervention, as often as once or twice weekly.

Typically, after 6-12 weeks, if one intervention is not helping, a second intervention is attempted. Usually, significant progress is made once a child consistently receives a research-based intervention specific to his/her areas of weakness. Sometimes, however, a child does not make progress, or his progress will not be sufficient for him to meet educational expectations within a reasonable amount of time. When this occurs, a child is typically referred for a special education evaluation to determine whether she has a Specific Learning Disability.

Few parenting situations provoke more anxiety than a child's academic difficulties. If you have concerns about your child's progress, ask your child's teacher or principal about the school's Response to Intervention program and request a meeting. If you are unsure whether your child is making adequate progress, contact the school psychologist to review progress monitoring data with you and discuss recommendations. It is important to note that a Specific Learning Disability is only one of thirteen possible special education disabilities; a school psychologist or a clinical psychologist may be able to alert you to other factors interfering with your child's education. Also, parents always have the right to request a special education evaluation at any point; remember, however, that the school may refuse if data suggests the child is unlikely to be eligible for services. Further, a diagnosis from a physician or clinical provider does not always indicate special education eligibility.

When should you request a Special Education Evaluation?

- A child is receiving consistent interventions, but making no or very slow progress.
- The student has a medical or psychiatric condition that is significantly interfering with his or her academic performance, and a 504 Plan has not been effective.
- After a traumatic brain injury.
- At age 3 years, if a child is exhibiting developmental delays or significant speech/articulation difficulties.
- When a child has a suspected autism spectrum disorder.



For more information, call
708-895-7310 or
219-226-1810



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