

Understanding New Approaches to the Determination of Specific Learning Disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 included important changes in the approaches schools use to determine specific learning disabilities.

Specific Learning Disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written. The disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. **Disorders not included:** The term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of vision, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic differences, or limited English language proficiency. When provided appropriate learning experiences, the child does not achieve adequately for age or State approved standards in one or more of the following areas: Basic Reading; Reading Fluency; Reading Comprehension; Written Expression; Math Calculation; Math Reasoning; Oral Expression; Listening Comprehension.

Based on state mandates, the Iosco RESA, in collaboration with our local school districts, is using new methods of assessment and instruction to identify learning deficits. The full and individual evaluation of a learning disability is now a process of data collection that includes multiple methods of assessing student performance with input from parents, teachers, instructional specialists, and if needed the school psychologists. There are new options for the determination of a specific learning disability. Schools may use a process of Response to Intervention (RtI) or analysis of Patterns of Strength and Weakness.

With the "Response to Intervention (RtI)" method, the student is provided with explicit evidence-based interventions. Student progress is carefully measured and the instructional interventions are adjusted to teach the skills necessary for the student to make progress toward age or grade level standards. Based on the student's response to the interventions, the team then determines whether or not the student demonstrates a specific learning disability.

The "Patterns of Strength and Weakness" method requires an extensive analysis of the student's performance, achievement or both, when compared to age, State approved grade level standards or intellectual development, using appropriate assessments.

The former method of comparing IQ to achievement has been proven to be ineffective as the sole identification model in the determination of a specific learning disability. Please refer to IDEA federal regulations 34 CFR § 300.309 and the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education, R.340.1713

If you should have further questions or comments, please visit www.ioscoresa.net or contact the special education department at 989-362-3006, ext. 129