Understanding Special Education Evaluations

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Objectives

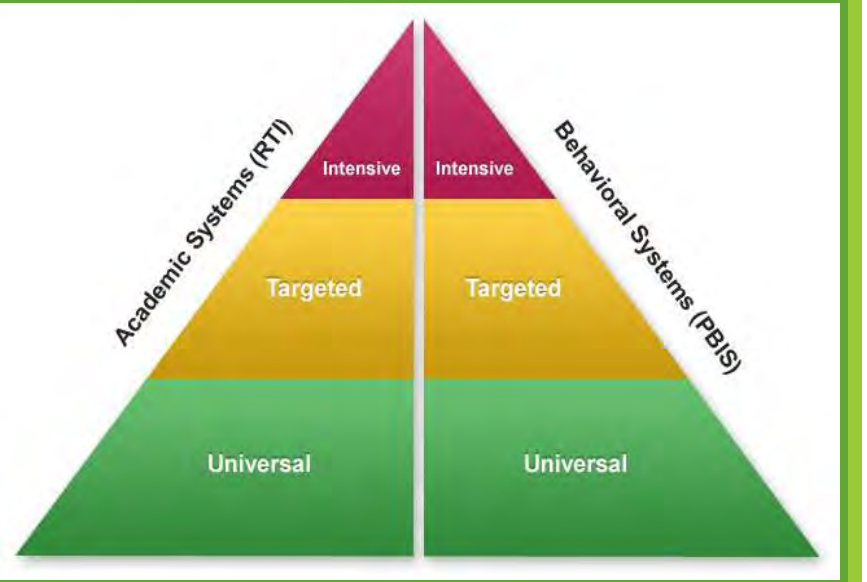
The purpose of this workshop is to assist parents and educators in better understanding special education evaluations.

1. To develop a better understanding of the evaluation process; Pre-referral through post-referral.
2. To develop an understanding of the evaluators: Who they are and the areas they assess.
3. To gain knowledge of different types of assessments and what they measure.
4. To learn about different types of scores and what they mean.
5. To gain a basic understanding of the WISC-V

The Evaluation Process

FROM PRE-REFERRAL TO TESTING

What is the evaluation process?



- Before a special education evaluation is initiated, students should go through Response to Intervention (RtI) as part of the Pre-referral Process.
- What is RtI?
  - The purpose is to identify, develop, and implement alternative education strategies for students who have recognized problems in the general education classroom **before** the student is referred to special education.
  - High-quality instruction and tiered, evidence-based Instruction.
  - Frequent monitoring of progress to make results-based decisions
  - Applying **child response data** to important educational decisions

Referral

- Once a referral has been made to special education the special education team must meet to dispose of the referral within 15 days.
- At the disposition meeting, which is inclusive of the parent, the referral is reviewed to determine if an evaluation is warranted.
- If the team determines other interventions that can be implemented to help the student, a special education evaluation may not be warranted at that time.

Referral

- If the team decides that more information is needed in order to determine appropriate interventions, then a special education evaluation is warranted.
- Generating evaluation questions is part of both the re-evaluation (for already identified students) as well as for the initial evaluation process.
- Specific evaluation questions are necessary because:
  - It helps the team better understand the concerns and the area(s) of suspected disability
  - It will determine what types of qualified examiners need to be a part of the team (e.g. Occupational therapist, speech pathologist, school psychologist, etc.)
  - The evaluators will be better able to tailor their assessments to answer the evaluation questions

Evaluation Questions

NONEXAMPLES

- Does he have a specific learning disability?
- What is her processing speed?
- Does he need OT?

EXAMPLES

- Why does he struggle with reading comprehension?
- Why when he sits with the teacher he gets it, but on the test he is not as successful?
- Why does she need things repeated?
- Why does she need so much time to complete tasks?
- How do his fine motor skills impact him in the classroom?
- Does he have difficulty processing visual information?

Evaluation Questions

NONEXAMPLES

- Does she need speech?
- Does he have ADHD?

EXAMPLES

- How do her communication skills impact her performance in the classroom?
- How do her communication skills impact her socialization?
- Why is attending to tasks so difficult?
- Why does he need so much repetition?
- Why can’t he sit still?

Evaluators

WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY ASSESS

Evaluators

- School Psychologist/Associate School Psychologist/Psychologist
- Certified Educator
- Occupational Therapist
- Speech and Language Pathologist
- Physical Therapist
- Guidance Counselor
- Teacher of the Deaf/Teacher of the Visually Impaired
- Professional Licensed to Provide a Health Evaluation
- Specialist in the Assessment of Intellectual Functioning (SAIF)

Evaluations

DIFFERENT KINDS OF ASSESSMENTS AND WHAT THE SCORES MEAN

Types of Assessments

- Academic
- Intellectual
- Cognitive
- Motor Skills
- Communication
- Adaptive Behavior
- Social-Emotional Functioning
- Vision/Hearing
- Health
- Vocational
- Other

What are Psychological Evaluations?

Set of assessment procedures administered by a licensed psychologist or credentialed school psychologist.

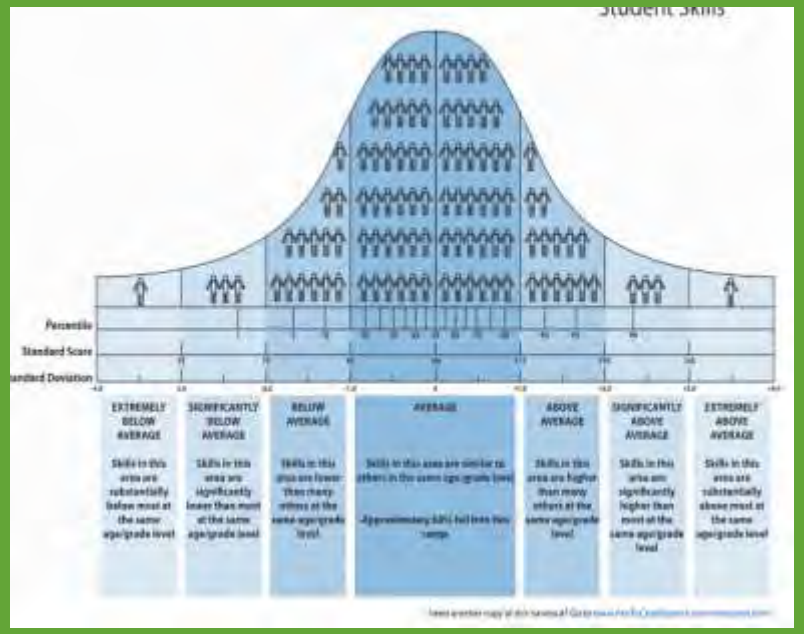
Used to obtain information about a child's learning, behavior, or mental health

Most often used to determine eligibility for special education services, but also can be used to help guide/inform instruction, develop behavior plans, or identify significant mental health concerns.

Types of Assessments Used

- Standardized tests: “Normed” measures that compare individual’s performance to an appropriate peer group.
- Rating Scales: Assess the presence or frequency of certain behaviors or skills. Dependent of the perceptions of the raters. “Norm Referenced” assessments.
- Self-Report Scales: Students provide ratings of their own behavior.
- Observations
- Interviews
- Criterion referenced assessments: Tests used to measure student mastery of instructional objectives

Test Scores



Standard Scores

- Scores that are based on a scale that has a standard mean (or average score) of 100.
- Normal Limits of functioning fall within 85 to 115.
- 68% of the general population falls within this range.

Subtest Scores

Types of scores for subtests vary

Most commonly used subtest scores are standard scores, t-scores, or scaled scores.

Reminder: Standard scores have a mean of 100 with 85-115 comprising the average range.

Subtest Scores

SCALED SCORES

Mean of 10

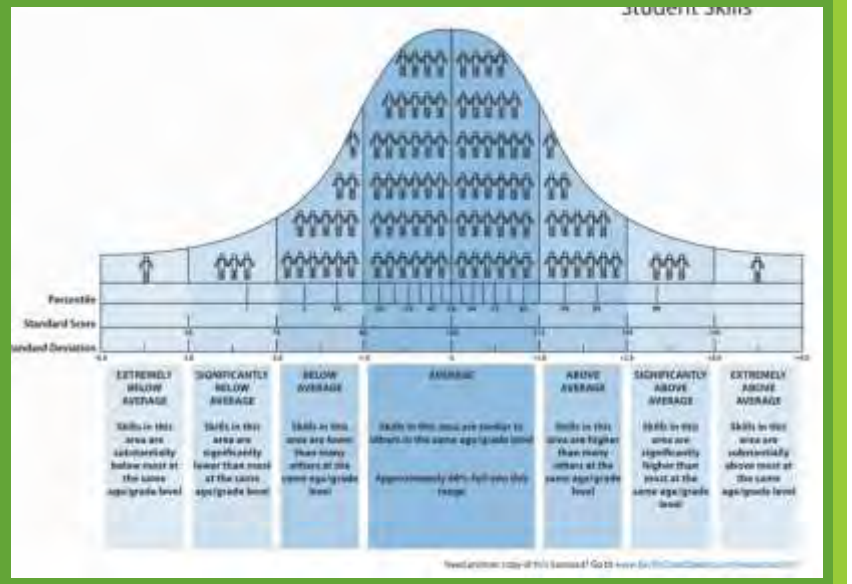
8-12 comprise the average range

T-SCORES

Mean of 50

43-56 comprise the average range

Percentile Ranks



- Indicates the percentage of individuals in the norm group that scored below a particular score.
- Example: A student who earned a score of 100 performed at the 50th percentile.
- Student performed as well as or better than 50% of same-aged peers in the general population.

Confidence Intervals

There is always the chance of error with any assessment administered.

The confidence intervals account for this variability.

Often listed as 90% confidence intervals: This means that 90% of the time we would expect the score to fall within that range.

Determining Strengths and Weaknesses

- Look at the overall range that the scores fall in and how they compare to other students their age.
- Look at the student's profile of scores and determine if there are any differences amongst the scores.
- Determine if the differences are statistically significant.
- Determine of the difference is highly unusual

Characterizing Strengths and Weaknesses

Normative Strength: One in which the score is above the average range for same aged peers.

Example: Standard score of 130

Normative Weakness: Once in which the score is below the average range for same aged peers

Example: Standard Score of 70

Relative Strength: One in which the student's performance is higher than we would expect given their ability level.

Relative Weakness: One in which the student's performance is higher than we would expect given their ability level.

WISC-V

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

WISC-V Description

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, 5th Edition

Purpose: Measure a child's intellectual ability (IQ).

Age Range: Children aged 6:0–16:11

Administration: Paper-and-pencil or digital (we use paper-and-pencil at PSD)

Completion Time: Core subtests: ~65 minutes, but typically more time is needed for complementary subtests, as well as time to build rapport with the student and time for breaks

Descriptive Classifications

Composite Score Range	WISC–V Descriptive Classification
130 and above	Extremely High
120–129	Very High
110–119	High Average
90–109	Average
80–89	Low Average
70–79	Very Low
69 and below	Extremely Low

5 Factor Model

Verbal Comprehension
- Similarities
- Vocabulary
- *Information*
- *Comprehension*

Visual Spatial
- Block Design
- Visual Puzzles

Fluid Reasoning
- Matrix Reasoning
- Figure Weights
- *Picture Concepts*
- *Arithmetic*

Working Memory
- Digit Span
- Picture Span
- *Letter-Number Sequencing*

Processing Speed
- Coding
- Symbol Search
- *Cancellation*

Verbal Comprehension

Measures verbal reasoning, vocabulary knowledge, verbal expression, and language based abilities.

Sometimes this is referred to as a measure of crystallized intelligence because it assesses acquired knowledge typically taught in schools.

Weaknesses in this area negatively impact students both academically and functionally because our world is very language based.

What might you see?

Difficulty with listening/reading comprehension.

Difficulty with accessing background knowledge/may not appear to have a great deal of background knowledge.

Difficulty with vocabulary

Student may seem to grasp concrete concepts, but has difficulty with higher level abstract reasoning

Secondary to verbal comprehension weaknesses teachers could report attention problems: It’s hard to attend when you are not processing what is being said.

Visual Spatial

- The ability to identify the spatial relationships and visual details of objects for the purpose of building a new design. The parts must be seen as elements of the whole design. Mental rotation and visualization of the solution is required.

What might you see?

- Difficulties with visually organizing work
- Difficulties with math; students may have difficulty with subjects such as geometry or with regrouping
- Poor attention to visual details
- Difficulties with reading charts, graphs, or with measurement
- Difficulties with copying notes from the board

Fluid Reasoning

Using visual information to identify a common theme or concept. Once the examinee figures out the underlying conceptual link, he/she must then apply that knowledge to identify the correct solution. Includes the use of inductive and deductive reasoning, as well as abstract thinking.

What might you notice?

- General difficulties with problem solving
- Students may seem unsure how to start new tasks
- Generalization and transfer of skills is poor.
- Difficulties with reading comprehension, especially inferential questions.
- Difficulties with seeing relationships in patterns and objects
- Difficulties with math computation

Working Memory

- The ability to hold information in mind long enough to change or combine it with other information.

- Working Memory is important in higher-order thinking, learning, and achievement. It can tap concentration, planning ability, cognitive flexibility, and sequencing skill, but is sensitive to anxiety too. It is an important component of learning and achievement, and ability to self-monitor.

What you might notice?

Working memory impacts *everything*

- Listening comprehension: remember complex multi-step directions.
- May impact ability to decode new words because the student struggles to hold onto the sequence of sounds long enough to blend them.
- Reading Comprehension: Can't hold on to all of the information necessary to comprehend the text.
- Difficulty processing all of the information necessary to complete math word problems, difficulty working through a sequence of steps (they get lost in the process).
- The brain must pull so much information into working memory to complete a writing task, students with these difficulties are like jugglers who are competent a juggling two balls, trying to juggle seven! Something drops!
- Difficulties with note taking

Processing Speed

- Measures the child's speed and accuracy of visual identification, and decision-making.
- Processing speed involves the child quickly and correctly scanning or discriminating between simple visual information.

What might you see?

- Poor reading fluency and comprehension
- Slow to respond to questions
- Needs more time to complete tasks
- Difficulty scanning the environment and quickly interpreting information
- Difficulty shifting between activities

Ancillary Indexes

Quantitative Reasoning

Auditory Working Memory

Nonverbal Index: NVI provides an estimate of general intellectual ability that minimizes expressive demands.

General Ability Index: GAI provides an estimate of general intellectual ability that is less reliant on working memory and processing speed than the FSIQ.

Cognitive Proficiency: CPI provides an estimate of the efficiency with which information is processed in the service of learning, problem solving, and higher order reasoning.

WISC-V

SAMPLE CASE

Composite/Subtest	Composite Score/ Scaled Score	Percentile Rank	Qualitative Description
Verbal Comprehension	**106**	**66th**	**Average**
Similarities	12		
Vocabulary	10		
Visual Spatial	**111**	**77th**	**High Average**
Block Design	12		
Visual Puzzles	12		
Fluid Reasoning	**94**	**34th**	**Average**
Matrix Reasoning	8		
Figure Weights	10		
Working Memory	**82**	**12th**	**Low Average**
Digit Span	7		
Picture Span	7		
Letter-Number Seq	*7*		
Processing Speed	**95**	**37th**	**Average**
Coding	8		
Symbol Search	10		
Cancellation	*8*		
Full Scale	**97**	**42nd**	**Average**
General Ability	**103**	**58th**	**Average**
Cognitive Proficiency	**85**	**16th**	**Low Average**

Questions?