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Assessment

April 2022

**1) Myth:** In Missouri, assessment practices and procedures are completely left up to each individual district to determine.

**Fact:** The [Missouri State Plan for Special Education, Regulation III](https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/regulation-iii-identification-and-evaluation-2), in direct alignment with the IDEA, outlines specific procedures that are to be followed in order for an evaluation conducted by an LEA to be in compliance. Those specific procedures include:

(1)**A variety of assessment tools and strategies are used to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the student**, including information provided by the parent, and information related to enabling the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum (or for a preschool student, to participate in appropriate activities), that may assist in determining whether the student is a student with a disability and the content of the student’s IEP.

(2) **No single measure or assessment is used as the sole criterion** for determining whether a student is a student with a disability and for determining an appropriate educational program for a student.

(3)The **public agency uses technically sound instruments** that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors.

(4)**Assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a student** under Part B of the Act **are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basi**s, are provided and administered in the student’s native language or other mode of communication, and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the student knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to provide or administer.

(5)**Assessments and other evaluation materials used** to assess a student are used f**or the purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable and are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of the tests**. If an assessment is not conducted under standard conditions, a description of the extent to which it varied from standard conditions (e.g., the qualifications of the person administering the test or the method of test administration) must be included in the evaluation report.

(6) **Assessments and other evaluation materials include those tailored to assess specific areas of educational need** and not merely those that are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient.

(7) **Assessments are selected and administered** **so as best to ensure** that if a test is administered to a student with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, th**e test results accurately reflect the student’s aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factors the test purports to measure,** rather than reflecting the student’s impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills (unless those skills are the factors that the test purports to measure).

(8)T**he student is assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability**, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.

(9)**Assessments of students with disabilities who transfer from one public agency to another public agency in the same school year are coordinated** with those students prior and subsequent public agency as necessary and a**s expeditiously as possible to ensure prompt completion of full evaluations**.

(10) In evaluating each student with a disability**, the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the student’s special education and related services needs,** whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the student has been classified.

(11) The public agency **uses assessment tools and strategies that provide relevant information** that directly assists persons in determining the educational needs of the student

**2) Myth:** Any teacher can administer academic achievement tests and IQ tests.

**Fact:** Staff who are administering standardized assessments such as academic achievement tests and cognitive ability tests must meet standards and qualifications set forth by the test publisher. Each test or measure is assigned a specific qualification level by the test publisher. Only staff who meet the criteria listed under the different qualification levels are deemed to have the appropriate training and expertise to administer the test. (See links below for specific information on qualification levels)

It is the responsibility of the user to determine if they meet the qualifications required by the test publisher to give the specific assessments. Typically, a high level of certification (e.g. Psychometric Examiner, School Psychologist, Psychologist, etc.) and training specifically in the area of cognitive assessments is required in order to be qualified to administer tests of cognitive ability. These qualifications are not driven by DESE mandates but derived from standards of practice from professional groups in the field of psychology and educational testing.

For example:

*Examiner qualifications for Riverside Insights™ Special Needs Assessments have been informed by the Joint Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA), & National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME). (2014). Standards for educational and psychological testing. Washington, DC: AERA).*

*Below are three applicable standards:*

* *11.3 Responsibility for test use should be assumed by or delegated only to those individuals who have the training, professional credentials, and experience necessary to handle this responsibility. Any special qualifications for test administration or interpretation specified in the test manual should be met. (p. 114)*
* *13.10 Those responsible for educational testing programs should ensure that the individuals who administer and score the test(s) are proficient in the appropriate test administration procedures and scoring procedures and that they understand the importance of adhering to the directions provided by the test developer. (p. 147)*
* *13.13 Those responsible for educational testing programs should ensure that the individuals who interpret the test results to make decisions within the school context are qualified to do so or are assisted by and consult with persons who are so qualified. (p. 148)*

Each test publishing company lists their examiner’s qualifications on their respective websites.

* [Riverside Insights User Qualifications](https://f.hubspotusercontent30.net/hubfs/7083436/Qualifications%20Guide.pdf)
* [Pearson User Qualifications](https://www.pearsonassessments.com/professional-assessments/ordering/how-to-order/qualifications/qualifications-policy.html)
* [WPS Qualifications Guidance](https://ecom-cdn.wpspublish.com/prod/media/content-wps/QualificationGuidelines.pdf)

Please note, these are just a few of the companies that supply testing materials to schools. It will be necessary to review the publisher’s website and manuals for **all** of your testing materials to ensure qualified individuals are administering assessments in your setting.

**3) Myth:** We can continue to use tests and protocols even when a new edition of the test is released.

**Fact:** It is important to review the versions of the assessments you are currently using. When test revisions are released they contain, among other things, updated norms, questions, content measures, and scoring guidelines. In order for tests to retain their validity and reliability it is important to use the most current editions of the assessments. While there is no clear rule regarding the time frame required to transition to the newest edition of a test, there is a “community standard” or professional consensus that you should switch to the newer test edition within one year of publication. ([*When to Upgrade to the Newest Revision of a Test*](https://www.pearsonassessments.com/content/dam/school/global/clinical/us/assets/When-to-Upgrade.pdf)) Using outdated tests can lead to results that are invalid and unreliable, thus, causing not only ethical concerns if used for special education eligibility, but also legal concerns as the results may not be legally defensible.

For additional information on this topic, please refer to the International Test Commission’s [Guidelines for Practitioner Use of Test Revisions, Obsolete Tests, and Test Disposal.](https://www.intestcom.org/files/guideline_test_disposal.pdf)

**4) Myth:** In order for the evaluation to be deemed “comprehensive in nature” we have to give the entire battery of an academic achievement test.

**Fact:** It depends. The team needs to consider the referral concerns and the existing data that has already been collected on the student. If there are no concerns in a specific area and data you have to substantiate the current level of functioning of the student in that particular area indicates no reason for concern, the team may not find it necessary to administer additional tests in that specific area. Comprehensive evaluation does not necessarily mean giving test batteries in their entirety. When determining what tests and measures to administer it is important to refer back to the specific referral concerns and the information collected in the Review of Existing Data (RED). The referral concerns and the RED process should drive the selection of tests. During the RED process the team must examine all the existing data and answer the questions: “What are we trying to find out?” and “What data do we still need to collect?” When teams answer these two questions, it pinpoints the purpose and needs of the evaluation. This in turn allows teams to individualize the test selection based on the purpose of collecting additional assessment data and the individualized needs defined in the referral and RED process. The selection of tests to administer should be based on those individualized concerns, not on the availability of tests in the district or a standard testing protocol that every student being evaluated for special education is administered, regardless of need.

Another factor that may play into determining if you need to give the entire test battery, is the test itself. Some tests allow you to pick and choose different tests or subtests to administer without having to administer the entire battery of tests (which is typical for standardized measures of academic achievement such as the WIAT, Woodcock Johnson and KTEA) Other tests require you to give the entire battery in order to obtain valid scores. It’s important to know the administration guidelines of the specific test you are giving in order to determine what administration options may be available for that particular test.

Teams will want to pay close attention to the additional assessments they decide to give. Teams will want to carefully balance the need to collect information critical to eligibility determinations and instructional programming with avoiding over assessing. Over assessing can strain your staffing resources, testing supplies, and subject the child to more assessment than what’s necessary. The Idaho Special Education Support and Technical Assistance Center developed this [video](https://idahotc.com/Portals/0/Resources/737/consent-and-evaluation/index.html#/lessons/RBoX7s7MC_tLLnUNhQdUQvaWFkGqVnmK) that provides excellent guidance on how to avoid over assessing and how to target the data you need to collect.

**5) Myth:** It’s ok to change up the way I give a standardized test to certain kids in order to accommodate for their needs. For example, I can give them more time on a timed section or tell them how to spell words on a writing section.

**Fact:** According to the American Psychological Association (APA) a standardized assessment is an assessment instrument administered in a predetermined manner, such that the questions, conditions of administration, scoring, and interpretation of responses are consistent from one occasion to another. Examiners must follow **all** instructions and testing guidelines, as written in the examiner’s manual, in order to obtain valid results. Any time examiners deviate from the standardized assessment instructions or procedures, it must be noted in the evaluation report and the team must analyze what impact the non-standardized procedures may have on the results of the test. On many occasions, giving assessments in a non-standardized way actually invalidates the scores the student obtains. This is why it is critical to read the test manual to know ahead of time what can and cannot be done when administering the test in order to have valid scores.

**6) Myth:** We should always use grade based norms when scoring achievement tests to be used with the discrepancy method.

**Fact:** Teams need to be fully trained on the test publisher’s recommendations and guidance in determining the set of norms to use for scoring. Both Pearson and Riverside Insights have published guidance in light of the recent educational disruptions due to COVID 19.

There are specific situations in which teams may want to consider one set of norms over the other. For instance, test publishers indicate a preference for using age based norms when comparing academic achievement results with other age based tests (e.g. cognitive ability, language) test results.

However there may be other variables, such as grade retention, early or late birthdays, etc. for teams to consider prior to making the determination as to which set of norms to use. Teams must follow test publisher guidance and be able to clearly convey why they used the norms they chose to use. Teams should not vary the norm sets they use solely to gain the biggest discrepancy. Teams must have a verified reason, per test publisher guidance, for using the norm set they chose to use and should, by virtue of best practice, indicate which norms they used and why in the evaluation report.

[Special Considerations for Score Interpretation (pearsonassessments.com)](https://www.pearsonassessments.com/content/dam/school/global/clinical/us/assets/telepractice/special-considerations-for-score-interpretation.pdf#:~:text=The%20primary%20advantage%20of%20age%20norms%20is%20that,for%20grade%20or%20have%20an%20unusual%20educational%20history.)

[What Norms Should I Use? (Age or Grade?) : Self-Help Portal (riversideinsights.com)](https://support.riversideinsights.com/support/solutions/articles/70000591961-what-norms-should-i-use-age-or-grade-)

[When should I use Age or Grade Based scoring? - Pearson Assessment Support](http://pearsonassessmentsupport.com/support/index.php?View=entry&EntryID=1440)

**7) Myth:** When I run the test results I don’t need to give the team all of the available scores. They just need a full scale IQ score and the scores on other assessments that meet criteria.

**Fact:** The evaluation report should contain a full account of each test or measure given to the student as part of their individualized evaluation. It is important that all the scores from the test or measure are reported within the evaluation report. Reporting all of the scores (index, composite, subtests, etc.) allows teams to do an in depth analysis of the scores across various levels and types of interpretation. Best practice is to report scores in a chart format followed with interpretative narrative.

**8) Myth**: I received my Psych Examiner Certification 10 years ago. I don’t need additional training on the tests I am giving.

**Fact:** Both IDEA and Missouri State Plan for Special Education, set forth the requirement for assessment staff to be trained and knowledgeable about the tests they are administering.

**Assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a student** are used for the purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable and **are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of the tests. (**Missouri State Plan, Regulation III, page 36-37)

Not only does this requirement speak to the fact that the examiner must meet examiner qualifications set forth by the test publisher, but they also must be knowledgeable about the test. Just because an examiner may hold the qualifications necessary to give the assessment per the test publisher’s requirements, if the examiner is not knowledgeable about the specific assessment, including how to interpret the results, they would not meet the requirement above. Examiners must stay current on test revisions, administration techniques and guidance on how to interpret the assessment results for each assessment or evaluation procedure they use. The APA’s Standard of Practice for Evaluations and Assessments state the following:

*Continual monitoring and self-assessment of competency boundaries are important in meeting standards of practice defined elsewhere. Rapid and ongoing development of instruments, procedures, norming advancements, technology, and evolving evidence-based practices can render a once-competent psychological examiner to unethical practice through habituation of patterns and personal preferences in assessment procedure and application Failure to gain initial competency and failure to maintain competency may both result in unethical practice (APA, 2017a).*[*APA Guidelines for Psychological Assessment and Evaluation*](https://www.apa.org/about/policy/guidelines-psychological-assessment-evaluation.pdf)

**9) Myth:** When I conduct a special education evaluation, the only purpose is to determine eligibility.

**Fact:** It is important to remember that when a student undergoes a comprehensive evaluation for special education, the purpose of that evaluation is not limited only to the determination of special education eligibility. This comprehensive evaluation should contain multiple sources of data gathered through multiple methods and, generally, from multiple settings (classroom, special education setting, home, ancillary classes, unstructured school settings, etc.). Teams will examine all of the sources of data for points of convergence and divergence. This process of synthesizing and analyzing all of the data points not only provides evidence for eligibility determinations; it also provides the team with a robust and individualized view of the student’s current academic and functional performance, inter and intra personal strengths, weaknesses, and unique profiles for learning. All of this information can and should be used to design instruction, interventions and accommodations that target the unique needs of the student. When mindsets regarding the purpose of special education evaluations are changed from “assessment for eligibility “ to “assessment for instruction, intervention, accommodations and eligibility” the evaluation can be much more impactful and assist in developing appropriate educational programming to meet the unique needs of the student.