

2009

GUIDELINES for IDENTIFYING

CHILDREN with

LEARNING DISABILITIES

Executive Summary
June 2009

Connecticut State
Department of Education

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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PREFACE

Students with specific learning disabilities are the largest single category of students receiving special education services in Connecticut. An increasing body of research evidence has suggested better ways to identify and teach these students. Spurred by this evidence, in 2004 the federal government included new identification criteria for specific learning disabilities in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). At the same time, the federal government required state departments of education to adopt criteria consistent with IDEA 2004 that would ensure uniformity in identification practices across school districts within states.

Consistent with IDEA 2004, Connecticut adopted a process that looks at a student's response to scientific, research-based interventions as part of a broader set of eligibility criteria in the identification of specific learning disabilities. In the literature, this process is referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI). The use of RTI helps to meet a key requirement of federal law by ensuring that students identified with specific learning disabilities do not have problems stemming mainly from a lack of appropriate instruction. The new criteria for identification of learning disabilities also are highly consistent with the concepts of Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), Connecticut's framework for addressing student achievement in a systemic manner and reducing achievement gaps. Together, both the SRBI Framework and the revised process for determining eligibility for students with specific learning disabilities can provide a unified system of general and special education to meet the needs of all students in Connecticut.

Giving sufficient guidance to school district personnel to enable them to implement the new criteria for identifying a student as having a specific learning disability and determining eligibility for special education services, required making this Executive Summary somewhat longer and more detailed than is typical for a document of this nature. The publication highlights information about the new criteria, how they compare to existing (1999) criteria and the rationale for various changes. The document also addresses other essential topics, such as the process for referral and conducting a comprehensive evaluation, including the role and rights of families; important considerations in the identification of specific learning disabilities; and examples of valuable print and electronic resources. A full document to accompany this Executive Summary will be forthcoming. Readers will want to consult the full document for greater elaboration of the content contained in this summary, as well as many practical examples and additional instructional information.

The new criteria for identifying specific learning disabilities and determining a student's eligibility for special education services will involve a major shift in educational practices for many school districts. Despite the challenges involved, these changes can provide more educationally relevant and less biased methods of assessment, earlier and more effective intervention and more appropriate identification of students with specific learning disabilities. Most importantly, improvements in identification practices can lead to better outcomes for these students.

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PURPOSE

This document is a revision of the previous *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999). Several events over the past 10 years have made updating the state guidelines on identifying students with learning disabilities essential. In 2004 and 2006, the reauthorization of the federal special education law, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*, IDEA 2004, introduced major changes to the manner in which school districts identify students with a specific learning disability. The changes contained in IDEA 2004 were driven, in part, by accumulating scientific evidence on individuals diagnosed with a specific learning disability. This research (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs and Barnes, 2007; National Reading Panel, 2000; and President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002) highlighted numerous concerns about the criteria used to identify students with a specific learning disability primarily as it related to the use of an IQ-achievement discrepancy model. New evidence suggests improved ways to more appropriately identify and teach students with learning disabilities.

This 2009 revision of the *Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* 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.

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 Code of Federal Regulations § 300.8(c)(10))

This definition is unchanged from those found in previous versions of federal law, such as IDEA 1997, and also unchanged from previous state guidelines for identification of learning disabilities (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999).

IDENTIFICATION OF A SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY AND DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

In order for a student to be identified as having a specific learning disability and be eligible for special education under IDEA, 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
3. 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 assessments as required by 34 CFR §§ 300.304 & 300.305 (34 CFR § 300.309(a)(2)(ii)).
4. 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)).
5. To ensure that underachievement in a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is not due to a 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)).
6. A child must not be determined to be a child with a disability if the determinant factor for that determination is:
 - 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 (34 CFR § 300.306(b)(1)).

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).

STATE OF CONNECTICUT CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING WHETHER 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, in order 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)(Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999),

AND no longer requires:

- A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes that impacts the areas of educational weakness (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999).

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 the addition of the requirement to document a student's inadequate response to scientific research-based interventions and the 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 Connecticut's 1999 state guidelines document. Moreover, Connecticut's special education regulations, Section 10-76d-7 states that alternative procedures and programs in regular education shall be explored and, where appropriate, implemented before a child 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 2009 guidelines, this requirement is addressed through documentation of inadequate response to intervention (RTI). 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, 2008b). 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.

These changes in eligibility criteria will be discussed further in this document, and will also be explained in greater detail in the full publication on guidelines for the identification of students with learning disabilities.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON CHANGES IN CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY

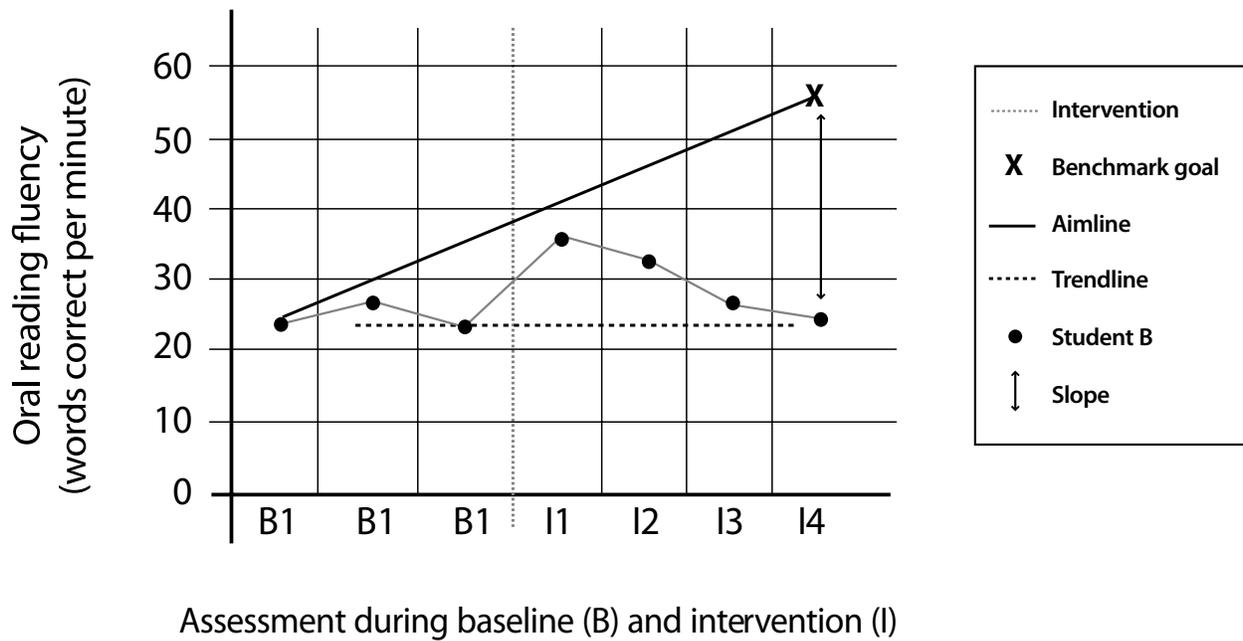
Determining inadequate response to intervention through SRBI

SRBI encompasses multitiered intervention 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), 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 the section titled “The Identification Process.”) When appropriate interventions are chosen and are implemented with fidelity, (i.e., delivered in the manner in which they were designed and intended to be used), data from SRBI can verify that appropriate instruction was provided. Interventions are relatively short term, typically eight to 20 weeks in duration per tier of intervention, but may be provided in a shorter time span when implemented as part of a comprehensive evaluation. This guideline is 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. Students’ responses to intervention must 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.

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. For instance, Figure 1 on page 6 provides an example of a student who is not responding to a reading intervention. At baseline, prior to intervention, the student averaged approximately 28 correct words per minute (CWPM) as measured with an oral reading fluency curriculum-based measure. The benchmark (X), the grade- or age-appropriate goal for the student, is 55 CWPM. The aimline indicates the progress the student would have to make in order to achieve the benchmark goal, that is, to catch up with his or her peers. During intervention the student’s four progress monitoring assessments, ranging from a high of 35 CWPM to a low of 24 CWPM, indicate that the student is performing at a level below her or his peers (first discrepancy). The slope of the dotted trendline for this student’s performance during intervention is flat, indicating that her or his rate of learning (second discrepancy) is not sufficient to close the gap between the current level and the expected level (peer comparison.) Assuming interventions were provided with integrity, this student’s pattern of flat or minimal progress would indicate that he or she is dually discrepant from peers, both with regard to level of performance and rate of growth during intervention. 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.

Both the level of a student’s performance and the rate of projected growth must be considered for a student to be demonstrating an adequate response to intervention. For example, a student whose math calculation skills are below grade expectations, but who is showing good response to a math intervention on a trajectory to catch up to grade-level peers in a few months, is showing adequate progress and should not be identified with a math disability. More information about how to determine whether progress is adequate during the course of an intervention is provided in the *2009 Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities* and is also found in the SRBI Framework.

Figure 1.
Process monitoring data from child NOT responding to a reading intervention



Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: CT's Framework for RTI (2008). CT: Author

Rationale for eliminating the IQ-achievement discrepancy requirement

The severe IQ-achievement discrepancy requirement necessitates documenting that a student's achievement in the area(s) of difficulty is substantially lower than her or his IQ would indicate it should be. In the 1999 state guidelines, to determine whether this requirement was met, diagnosticians used a table to compare a student's standard scores on achievement tests with her or his IQ score (see Connecticut State Department of Education, 1999, Appendix F). This procedure was consistent with the requirements of federal law (IDEA 1997) that were in effect at the time the 1999 state guidelines were developed.

However, employing a severe IQ-achievement discrepancy for identification of a specific learning disability has been widely criticized in the scientific community for a number of reasons (Fletcher et al., 2007; Gunderson and Siegel, 2001; Spear-Swerling, 2004; Stanovich, 2000). Participants at the LD Summit, a national initiative sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education held in Washington, D.C. on August 27 and 28, 2001, concluded that "IQ/achievement discrepancy is neither necessary nor sufficient for identifying individuals with SLD" (Bradley, Danielson and Hallahan, 2002, p. 796). Among other problems, an IQ-achievement discrepancy tends to make early identification of a specific learning disability difficult because it often takes time for students to accumulate a discrepancy that is significant enough to qualify for services. Such a "wait to fail" model without appropriate intervention also creates a higher likelihood that a student will ultimately qualify as having a specific learning disability. In addition, IQ-achievement discrepancy models of learning disabilities are based on the assumption that IQ is a valid indicator of students' broad "potential" for learning. This assumption is problematic (Stanovich, 2000), especially for certain populations such as English language learners, students from culturally different groups, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In many respects, the IQ-achievement discrepancy requirement appears to be biased toward the identification of Caucasian students (Speece et al., 2003) and those from middle or upper socioeconomic backgrounds (Fletcher et al., 2007) as students with a specific learning disability, where minority students, students from underrepresented groups, or those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be identified as having an intellectual disability. Since students from non-mainstream cultural groups often possess cognitive styles that differ from those promoted in the schools, the use of standardized tests can lead to cultural misunderstandings and inappropriate assessment or instruction (McIntyre, 1996).

Furthermore, documentation of an IQ-achievement discrepancy can be time-consuming and expensive, and, by itself, does not necessarily yield instructionally useful information (Aaron, Joshi, Gooden and Bentum, 2008). Finally, research does not support the exclusion of nondiscrepant low achievers — those whose IQs are not high enough for them to meet an IQ-achievement discrepancy criteria — from receiving special education services. For example, students experiencing difficulty reading who do not have IQ-achievement discrepancies often benefit from similar interventions as do those with IQ-achievement discrepancies (Gunderson and Siegel, 2001), and most studies have not shown IQ to be an important predictor of intervention responsiveness (Fletcher et al., 2007).

It should be noted that, although routine IQ testing in the identification of a specific learning disability is no longer required to determine a severe discrepancy, Planning and Placement Teams have the option to request the administration of individual IQ tests if they believe such tests could provide information that would be helpful in a particular student's evaluation.

Rationale for no longer requiring evidence of a specific processing disorder

Determining the presence of a processing disorder has historically been problematic for professionals in the field. Despite the current availability of technically adequate tests, many of the processing measures used in the identification of learning disabilities lack technical adequacy or fail to distinguish learning disabilities from other kinds of low achievement (Hoskyn and Swanson, 2000; Reschly and Tilly, 1999; Salvia and Ysseldyke, 2004). For example, 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, at least in the domain of reading, research (Siegel, 2003; Stanovich, 2000) strongly links most cases of learning disabilities to linguistic and phonological difficulties, not processing problems. Furthermore, low scores on processing measures, by themselves, do not necessarily indicate that a student has a genuine “disorder” or specific learning disability, because a student’s performance on processing measures may be influenced by experience and instruction as well as by his or her intrinsic abilities. Overall, the primary concern for educators is that the indiscriminate use of processing measures may contribute to excessive testing that does not help to identify genuine learning disabilities or provide instructionally relevant information (Fletcher et al., 2007; Torgesen, 2002).

It should be noted that, over the past decade, a substantial link for a causal relationship between cognitively-based information processing and learning disabilities has been described in literature, particularly in area of reading achievement (Floyd, Keith, Taub and McGrew, 2007; Hulme, Snowling, Caravolas and Carroll, 2005; Meltzer and Krishnan, 2007; Torgesen, 2002; Wolf and Bowers, 1999). 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 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 CFR § 300.8(c)(10)). 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 PPT believes such information may be helpful as part of a comprehensive evaluation.

THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

The importance of SRBI

Identification of a specific learning disability must occur in the context of a scientific research-based intervention process. SRBI, Connecticut’s response-to-intervention (RTI) framework (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008a, 2008b) is a prekindergarten through Grade 12 state initiative focused primarily on core general education practices, core curriculums and instruction, although a variety of support services personnel also play important roles. Like all RTI models, SRBI combines the use of research-validated interventions with population-based systems approaches to education. Population-based systems approaches 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 progress monitoring of the entire school population employs common assessments that are the same for all students within a grade. This kind of universal screening and routine monitoring with common assessments is the only way to detect and address learning and behavioral difficulties at an early stage. Different levels of intervention, including behavioral and social-emotional as well as academic interventions, are provided for students experiencing varying degrees of need. Access to intervention does not require a special education label, but rather is an integral part of a comprehensive educational system.

SRBI requires a systemic approach to general education practices. Systemic means consistent across a district, or at least within a school. For example, different teachers at the same grade level would use the same core general education curriculums in academic areas such as reading and mathematics, the same universal common assessments for all students to monitor their progress, the same research-based effective teaching strategies such as providing explicit feedback (Marzano, Pickering and Pollock, 2001), and the same comprehensive system of social-emotional learning and behavioral supports such as establishing the same clear, consistent expectations and reinforcements for behavior. Core practices also would be well coordinated

across grades. This kind of consistency and coordination are essential for ensuring that core general education practices work for most students and are not inadvertently contributing to learning or behavior difficulties in some children. Other key features of SRBI include making certain that core general education practices and interventions are research-based as much as possible (i.e., to the extent that research exists to inform them); monitoring fidelity of implementation, meaning that curriculums and interventions are used as intended; differentiation of instruction for all learners, including students performing above and below grade-level expectations; the use of culturally responsive teaching; and data-driven decision making, with data used not only to improve instruction for individual students, but also to improve core general education practices and the overall effectiveness of interventions. The National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) provides extensive resources on implementing all aspects of scientific research-based interventions (www.rti4success.org/).

Connecticut's SRBI Framework employs universal common assessments and a three-tiered model, represented graphically as a triangle (see Figure 2 on page 10). Tier I is the base, the largest part of the triangle, involving core general education practices for all students; the two successive tiers, the middle (Tier II) and top (Tier III) of the triangle, involve increasingly intensive levels of intervention for students experiencing difficulties, with Tier III being the most intensive. Interventions are short term and highly focused on individual student's specific needs (e.g., in reading, decoding skills vs. fluency vs. comprehension; in math, calculation skills vs. problem solving). In addition, interventions occur in homogeneous groups and remain part of the general education system, with support from specialists such as special educators, bilingual educators, reading/language arts consultants, speech and language pathologists and behavioral/mental health personnel (e.g., school psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors, school nurses). Tiers II and III should not be viewed as categorical placements or "gates" to special education, but rather as ways to improve the capacity of general education to meet a reasonable range of individual differences in students' academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs. More detailed information about SRBI can be found in the full document (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008b).

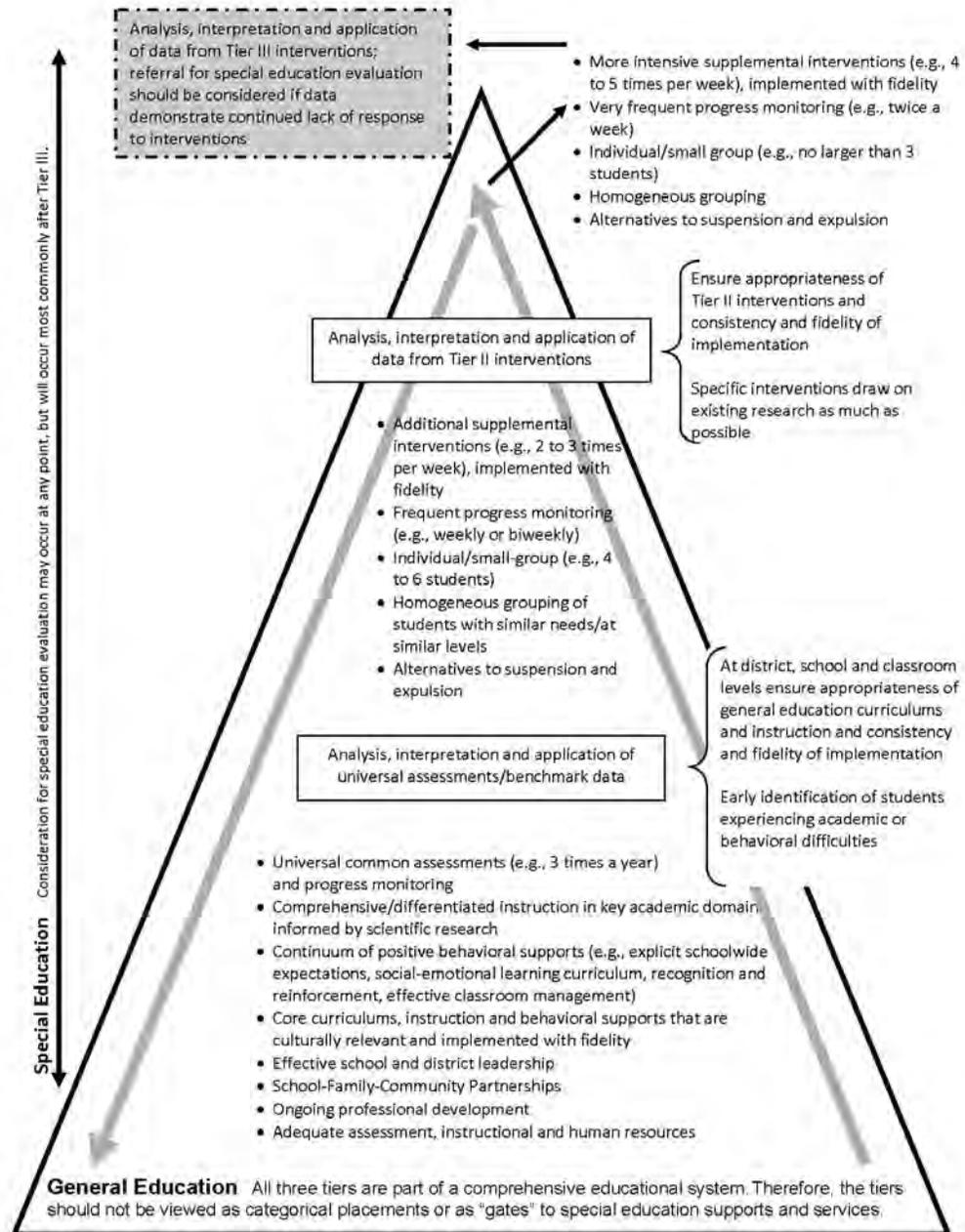
The use of SRBI will not eliminate the need for special education services. However, it will help to ensure that these services are targeted toward students who truly require them, as well as meet federal mandates to document that students being considered for special education have received appropriate instruction.

Referral for identification of a specific learning disability

Students can be referred for an evaluation for a specific learning disability at any time, including during any tier of SRBI instruction. Connecticut Special Education Regulations require that students who demonstrate unsatisfactory behavior, attendance or progress in school must be promptly referred to a PPT (see 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 intervention strategies are required on the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report for students suspected of having a specific learning disability to assist in ruling out that a student's difficulties were not due to a lack of appropriate instruction in math or reading. SRBI, while similar to the implementation of early intervention strategies, is a much more comprehensive, systemic process used to document a student's response to appropriate instruction.

Once schools are implementing an effective SRBI 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 whether interventions were appropriately matched to an individual student's needs, whether the interventions were implemented with fidelity, and whether assessments used in progress monitoring were technically adequate and appropriate to the student's area of difficulty. 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 that is being implemented. Regardless of when in the SRBI process the

Figure 2.
Three-Tiered Model From SRBI Framework



Using Scientific Research-Based Interventions: CT's Framework for RTI (2008). CT: Author

interventions occur, once a referral is received, the district must convene a PPT to review the referral and decide if a special education evaluation is warranted. The PPT may determine that a special education evaluation is not needed and the parent would then have the right to challenge that refusal through due process.

Design of a comprehensive evaluation

Although documentation of a student's inadequate response to intervention is necessary, an individually designed comprehensive evaluation remains vital in identifying a student with a specific learning disability (Ofiesh, 2006). To help ensure that an evaluation is comprehensive, the PPT must first gather input from multiple sources (e.g., families, general 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 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. 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 disability, school personnel must provide notice to parents that describes any proposed evaluation procedures (34 CFR § 300.304(a)) and conduct an evaluation consistent with the requirements of IDEA 2004, including the requirements that:

Each public agency must ensure that the following evaluation procedures are met: (c)(1) 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 purpose 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)).

Evaluations for a specific learning disability must consider all of the following: input from families; any educationally relevant medical findings; information from general education observations of the student's behavior and academic functioning in the areas of difficulty; data relevant to exclusionary criteria (e.g., hearing screenings, vision screenings, school attendance, determination of English language proficiency if a student is an English language learner); and information indicating whether the student's difficulties require special education and related services.

A comprehensive evaluation must be planned by the child's parents and the members of a PPT that includes, among others, the student's parents, the student's regular education teacher, at least one specialist qualified to conduct individual student diagnostic examinations (e.g., school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, reading teacher) (34 CFR § 300.308) 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 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)). Connecticut Special Education Regulations also require that the results of standardized or local tests of ability, aptitude, affect, achievement and aspiration not be exclusively used as the basis for placement (10-17d-9(b)(2)).

For a student who has participated in a process that assesses her or his response to scientific, research-based intervention, the instructional strategies used and the student-centered data that were collected must be documented (34 CFR § 300.311(7)(i)). It is expected that a “rule-out” for lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math will include consideration of evidence of exposure to appropriate research-based instruction as well as use of effective classroom management practices to address student behavior that may impact a student’s ability to learn. Other factors also may be considered, and these are outlined in further detail later in this document. Eligibility findings must be documented in writing using one of the state-provided Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report forms in Appendix A. For ease of use, two format options of this Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report are available — one in portrait and one in landscape format.

Role and rights of families

Parents and other family members closely involved in raising a student have important roles to play in the comprehensive evaluation process to identify a student as having a disability. Families are key sources of information about students. Among other types of insights, families may provide information about a student’s specific strengths and weaknesses, including functioning outside of school; cultural and linguistic background and the possible influence of this background on behavior or achievement; family dynamics and history, including recent situational trauma such as divorce or death of a family member; and prior schooling, including experiences such as private tutoring, native language instruction and access to preschool education. IDEA 2004 requires that school personnel collect and consider parental input in a comprehensive evaluation for eligibility determination (34 CFR §§ 300.304(b)(1), 300.305(a)(1)(i) & (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 formal evaluation process, students who are participating in a comprehensive special education evaluation should continue to have access to SRBI interventions. Families must receive data-based documentation that reflects the student’s progress during these interventions. When educators take steps to inform families about SRBI, share information, and listen and respond to families’ concerns, they can provide a better educational program for the student and avoid many potential problems.

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. From the date of the referral to the completion of the evaluation, identification, eligibility determination and writing and implementing an IEP, the timeline is 45 school days (exclusive of the time necessary to secure parental consent) under Section 10-76d-13 of the State Regulations unless the PPT and the family extend that time frame by mutual written agreement (34 CFR § 300.309(c)). However, a PPT may conclude, through analysis of data that document a student’s progress through the use of appropriate, technically adequate assessments, that a student is making sufficient, adequate progress through SRBI, and that further 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, and may use mediation if agreed to by the district. A PPT also may determine that a trial diagnostic placement (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 determine the student’s IEP (Connecticut Regulations § 10-76d-14(b)). A diagnostic placement is an evaluation.

KEY ISSUES IN ASSESSMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

IDEA 2004 contains provisions regarding evaluation procedures (34 CFR § 300.304). Among the procedures enumerated, the following are key issues to consider when the PPT plans a comprehensive evaluation:

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. 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 a native speaker of a student's language as an evaluator. It is essential to interpret assessment information in the context of a student's sociocultural and linguistic background (Donovan and Cross, 2002; Harry and Klinger, 2006), such as considering whether a student is likely to have had an opportunity to learn the content being tested. Decision making and selection of assessments also should not be guided solely by a desire to have a student receive services (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007). Furthermore, 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 are assessed.

Language status

Language status refers to whether or not a student is an English language learner. If a student is an English language learner, PPTs should be especially mindful of two types of potential identification errors: 1) inappropriate classification of English language learners as having a specific learning disability receiving 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).

Behavior and social-emotional functioning

Students' 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. In Connecticut's SRBI Framework, 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 in Tier I and the provision of appropriate interventions in Tiers II and III (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008a, 2008b). Increasing capacity in behavioral and social-emotional domains as well as in academic areas can help schools ensure that referrals to special education are not related to ineffective core general education practices. 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).

Data to document appropriate instruction

The importance of the use of appropriate assessments during the implementation of SRBI and in continued monitoring of a student's progress in special education to document response to interventions cannot be

overstated. For instance, the use of inappropriate universal common assessments in Tier I will completely undermine 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. Likewise, in the provision of Tiers II and III interventions, 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 must be technically adequate (e.g., reliable and valid), as well as appropriate to their intended use. The selection of appropriate measures for assessing student learning, both for universal screening of all students and for monitoring a student's response to intervention, is especially critical. 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. Progress-monitoring assessments also must be relatively brief and easy to administer, or they will drain an inordinate amount of instructional time. Moreover, the assessments must be sensitive to changes in student learning and must correctly target the student's specific weakness, the one addressed in the intervention. For example, if a student's primary difficulty in mathematics involves computation, 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.

Most authorities on RTI (Fuchs, 2004; Hosp, Hosp and Howell, 2007; McCook, 2006) recommend the use of curriculum-based measures (CBMs) for progress monitoring. CBMs are 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 or timed completion of a set of grade-appropriate math items for overall mathematics achievement. Early CBMs were developed from local curriculums, but currently a number of generic, published CBMs 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. An excellent review of published progress-monitoring assessments can be found at the Web site of the National Center on Student Progress Monitoring, <http://www.studentprogress.org/chart/chart.asp>. Additional information on this topic is available on the new National Center on Response to Intervention Web site: <http://www.rti4success.org>.

CBMs are intended to serve as quick measures 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, involves measures that attempt to pinpoint a student's specific strengths and weaknesses in a given domain. As defined in the SRBI Framework (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008b) 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, is not sufficient or too broad" (pg. 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 handwriting, spelling, use of basic writing conventions, quality and organization of content, and use of prewriting, revision and editing processes. Information from the diagnostic assessments can then be used to target intervention appropriately. Progress-monitoring assessments such as CBMs 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. Subsequently, if a PPT determines that a comprehensive special education evaluation is necessary, detailed data from such diagnostic assessments can contribute valuable information.

The option to administer IQ tests

Although a discrepancy between measured intellectual ability and educational performance is no longer required in determining whether to identify a student as having a specific learning disability, 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 is suspected of having an intellectual disability, as when he or she manifests broad developmental delays involving adaptive functioning (e.g., social or self-help skills), or identifying intellectual giftedness in a student with a specific learning disability. IQ tests may be useful for assessing specific types of abilities, for instance, for nonverbal areas such as spatial abilities, and for helping team members better understand an individual student's strengths and weaknesses.

With regard to gifted students with a specific learning disability, it should be noted that frequently the strengths of such students partially mask the 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 standardized reading comprehension measures, despite having great difficulty meeting everyday classroom demands involving reading. Thus, as practitioners seek out this unique subset of students, it is especially important to look carefully at an individual student's patterns of 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 reading disability, measures of phonological processing may help to provide information about her or his overall strengths and weaknesses in the language abilities that are foundational for reading, assuming they are given as part of a broader evaluation that also includes other measures of language and reading. 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 (Hayes and Flower, 1980; Hooper, Swartz, Wakely, deDruif and Montgomery, 2002; Peverly, 2006). For the reasons noted previously, 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 writing), 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.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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., socio-economic status, family dynamics, religious values) create individual differences that must be acknowledged in order to effectively understand and engage students from different cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds. 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.

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). The sole use of 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 of paramount importance for gathering accurate data for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Relative to other states, Connecticut has had especially large gaps in achievement between students of different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet, 2006; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007). To avoid disproportionate representation of students with cultural or linguistic differences in special education, diagnosticians should be mindful of cultural influences on students' learning and behavior prior to and during a comprehensive evaluation. Moreover, issues regarding identification or overidentification of students with disabilities can emanate not only from bias in tests, but from the attitudes and perceptions of the school personnel who make decisions about the students referred for testing (Donovan and Cross, 2002; Harry and Klingner, 2006; Salvia and Ysseldyke, 2004).

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 the native 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 the native 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 native 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 native 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 Department's *Guidelines for Speech and Language Programs* (2008). Conversely, if a student has progressed normally in language development in the native language, or has progressed well in academic learning with native 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 and 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 on page 2 of 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. 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.

Adequacy of assessments

In addition to selecting technically adequate, nonbiased, appropriate assessments for use in comprehensive evaluations, Planning and Placement Teams should consider, when possible, the adequacy of assessments that were administered to collect data used to document a student's response to intervention—in particular, the adequacy of progress-monitoring assessments used in the SRBI process. As described earlier, technically adequate assessments appropriately targeted to a student's individual needs are essential for the SRBI process to work as intended. If members of the PPT believe the technical adequacy or appropriateness of assessments used during the SRBI process is questionable, they should take this into account when reviewing such data in a comprehensive evaluation, notify educators involved in the SRBI process of their concerns, and suggest more appropriate assessments to be administered now and in the future. For the student being evaluated, additional 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.

Adequacy of interventions and fidelity of implementation

When using data from an SRBI process as part of a comprehensive evaluation, the PPT must consider the overall efficacy of Tier I practices for most students in a school or district, whether interventions used in 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. As part of the SRBI process, school personnel should be gathering and analyzing data relevant to the efficacy of all three tiers, such as data on the percentage of students who meet reading and math benchmarks on universal common assessments in Tier I, the percentage of students who demonstrate adequate progress in Tiers II and III interventions, and suspension and expulsion data, (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008a, 2008b; see also Kurns, Morrison and Batsche, 2006). For Tier I practices to be deemed effective, 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 in Tiers II and III (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2008a, 2008b). 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.

Finally, student data that are collected in the implementation of the SRBI process should meet the criteria set forth in the use of a dual discrepancy. This 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.

FROM THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL TO THE MIDDLE-SECONDARY LEVEL AND BEYOND

Transition from elementary to the middle-secondary level

Under 2009 criteria, many students with a specific learning disability will be identified at the elementary level, roughly between Grades 2 and 5. However, a specific learning disability sometimes may manifest at the middle or secondary level in students who have not previously been identified. Even with highly competent elementary-level efforts at early identification and intervening services, there are at least three reasons why a specific learning disability may emerge in some students at later grade levels.

First, all students face a number of challenges as they advance beyond elementary school: interacting with multiple teachers across different academic domains, increased demands on organizational skills and the ability to work independently; possible changes from a neighborhood school to a more centralized and larger middle or high school; and a shift in focus from more basic skills to content-area learning. Second, and also common to all students, are the developmental transformations of adolescence, which often bring physiological, social-emotional and behavioral changes that may influence academic performance. Planning and Placement Teams at the middle and secondary levels should consider whether general education is addressing adequately these common concerns for all students (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1997). And third, some students may compensate well for relatively mild difficulties in the early grades, but may have more significant difficulties in the later grades as the volume and complexity of the workload increases. 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.

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, 2007). Postsecondary institutions and employers are under no obligation to identify or provide evaluations for students with a specific learning disability; however, all individuals with disabilities are protected from discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and they may also be eligible for services under both ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Under these laws, the individual is required to submit documentation of her or his disability and its limitations to a major life function, 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.

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 that is necessary to assist a student to meet her or his 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, such as a specific learning disability, appropriate documentation that informs professionals at the postsecondary level about the types of services and accommodations that are necessary for the student to participate on a "level playing field" and be successful are a critical component of the transition planning required under IDEA 2004.

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 in developing annual goals and objectives at each student's annual review. The second involves a document termed the Summary of Performance (SOP). The SOP is a summary of a student's academic achievement and functional performance (e.g., organizational skills, test-taking skills, time management), including recommendations about how to help a student meet her or his postsecondary goals. 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.

CONCLUSION

These revised guidelines for identifying children with learning disabilities meet the mandates of IDEA 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Even more important, however, they provide opportunities to improve outcomes for students with a specific learning disability through identification procedures that are based on more accurate data, less biased assessments and more helpful data for planning appropriate instruction. Equally vital, the current guidelines also provide students who have not yet been identified as having a specific learning disability a better chance for prompt and targeted intervention through SRBI as well as receipt of special education services. Readers of this Executive Summary are encouraged to consult both the full guidelines document, which will contain detailed information about the topics mentioned here, and the sources referenced on the next four pages.

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APPENDIX

**[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
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: <i>[Note: At least <u>one</u> area must be identified.]</i> <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.	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.	*	
D.	Learning difficulty is <i>primarily</i> due to:	YES	NO
	1. Lack of instruction in math, reading or writing ^o (<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).			
E.	Has NO been (✓)'d for all items in D above (#1-7)?		
F.	Does information gathered through the required evaluation components (including consideration of a dual discrepancy**) indicate that a specific learning disability exists in the area identified above (in A)?	†	
G.	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).

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

†**Criteria F:** If a specific learning disability exists in **one of the eight areas above** (in II A), **attach** a summary statement of all formal and informal assessment data used to document the existence of such a disability.

****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: _____

Received State-approved extension to delay assurances J & K until July 1, 2010: YES NO

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

_____	General education teacher _____
_____	Examiner/special education instruction _____
_____	Examiner/pupil personnel services _____
_____	Administrator _____
_____	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:

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

II. Criteria	Criteria Met	
	YES	NO
Respond to each criteria used to determine eligibility for students suspected of having a specific learning disability.		
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: <i>[Note: At least <u>one</u> area must be identified.]</i> <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. 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.	*	

D. Learning difficulty is <i>primarily</i> due to:		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).
1.	Lack of instruction in math, reading or writing ^o (Based on Math, Reading or Writing Worksheets)			
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			
E. Has NO been (✓)'d for all items in D above (#1-7)?				
F. Does information gathered through the required evaluation components (including consideration of a dual discrepancy**) indicate that a specific learning disability exists in the area identified above (in A)?				†
G. 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).
- ^oCriteria D-1:** Math, Reading and/or Writing Worksheets are attached (unless math, reading and/or writing are not an area of weakness)
- †Criteria F:** If a specific learning disability exists in **one of the eight areas above** (in II A), **attach** a summary statement of all formal and informal assessment data used to document the existence of such a disability.
- **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: _____
- Received State-approved extension to delay assurances J & K until July 1, 2010:** YES NO
- 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.)

<u>Signature</u>	<u>Title</u>
_____	General education teacher _____
_____	Examiner/special education instruction _____
_____	Examiner/pupil personnel services _____
_____	Administrator _____
_____	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: _____

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