Answers to Frequently Asked Questions for the

Specific Learning Disabilities

Evaluation Guideline

September 2011

InghamIntermediateSchool District

Questions for LD Guidelines FAQ document

What if my district doesn't have a standardized universal screening measure in a particular academic area?

Universal screening is a necessary core component of a fully implemented Response to Intervention (RtI) system. If your district has not yet implemented universal screening, it will be important to continue to advocate for universal screening, particularly at the elementary level. Until universal screening is adopted school or district-wide, you could consider administering a universal screener to the entire class or grade-level from which you have a student referred for a specific learning disability (SLD) evaluation. By assessing the entire grade level, you will have a broader sample against which to compare the performance of the referred student. This data could also be used for other evaluations or reevaluations that are generated from that grade level later in the year. If assessing an entire grade-level or class is not feasible, you could individually assess the referred student and compare his/her performance to the national normative sample for that particular assessment. This would provide information as to the student's performance relative to grade level peers nationwide. If you have difficulty accessing this information, contact the Program Evaluation department at Ingham ISD.

If my district doesn't have AIMSweb , where can I find a universal screener?

There are a variety of universal screener options available, some of which are available at no cost. Some examples include:

- DIBELS Next , which offers free screeners in the areas of first sound fluency, phoneme segmentation fluency, nonsense word fluency, letter naming fluency, reading comprehension, and oral reading fluency (www.dibels.org)
- EasyCBM, which offers free screeners in the areas of word reading fluency, passage reading fluency, multiple choice reading comprehension, math numbers and operations, math geometry, and math numbers operations and algebra (www.easycbm.com)

How should a student's participation in an intervention be documented?

Detailed documentation of a student's participation in an intervention is essential in order to provide an accurate analysis of a student's response to that intervention for the purposes of SLD eligibility. If your district is using a data system like AIMSweb or DIBELS to monitor progress, this information may be entered and accessed through that system. If you are not using that system this information needs to be clearly documented. Documentation of the interventions should include the following information:

- Date of each intervention period
- Duration of the intervention (i.e., 20 minute sessions)
- Group size (i.e., one-on-one, 1 adult to 3 students, etc.)

- Description of intervention program (i.e., PALS, 6-Minute Solutions, etc.) and/or the instructional focus (short vowels, phonics, reading fluency, etc)

What information needs to be documented to show response to intervention?

Students participating in intervention will need to be assessed at weekly or bi-weekly intervals in order to monitor their response to intervention. If your district is not using AIMSweb, you will need to identify efficient tools that can be administered at repeated intervals for the purpose of progress monitoring. Many of the assessments that are utilized for universal screening have multiple forms and can therefore be administered at frequent intervals. If local norms are unavailable, a student's performance should be compared to the national norms provided by the developers of the assessment utilized. ***Please refer to pages 14-15 in the Ingham ISD SLD Evaluation and Eligibility Guidelines for additional information regarding progress monitoring.***

Who will progress monitor all of the students who are accessing intervention?

Any person who has been adequately trained may administer progress monitoring assessments. Trainings are periodically offered through InghamIntermediateSchool District. Additionally, many assessment tools have on-line training modules that provide opportunities to observe and practice administration and scoring of specific measures. It is, of course, best practice to have an experienced assessor provide supervision and feedback to those who have been recently trained.

What are the components of a "comprehensive evaluation" for SLD?

According to Federal law, information regarding a student's response to intervention is only one component of an SLD evaluation. A comprehensive evaluation is necessary to determine *why* a child has not responded to intervention. A comprehensive evaluation must include:

- A variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional developmental and academic information about the child, including information provided by a parent.
- Assessment in all areas related to the suspected disability
- Assessment sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of the child's special education and related services needs
- Information from a variety of sources, including aptitude and achievement tests, parent input and teacher recommendations, as well as information about the child's physical condition, social or cultural background and adaptive behavior
- Information gathered through observations of the child's academic performance in the general education classroom

What information needs to be considered during an RtI evaluation versus a PSW evaluation?

All SLD evaluations must “rule in”

1. inadequate achievement and progress in age and/or grade level content and
2. adverse impact to the point that the child requires special education and/or related services

while “ruling out”

1. inadequate achievement due to other disabilities/factors or
2. a lack of appropriate instruction.

This is accomplished through the comprehensive evaluation components described above. Many of the components of an SLD evaluation are the same, regardless of whether you are utilizing an RtI or a PSW approach , as depicted below:

Evaluation Component	RtI	PSW
Curriculum-Based Assessment (e.g., universal screening and/or progress monitoring data, AIMSweb, DIBELS)	Yes	Yes
Criterion-Referenced Assessment (e.g., Brigance)	Maybe, if needed to guide intervention	Maybe, if necessary to clarify pattern of strengths/weaknesses
Norm-Referenced Assessment (e.g., WIAT-III, WJ-III)	Maybe, if needed to guide intervention	Required for initial evaluations Maybe for re-evaluations, if needed to clarify pattern of strengths/weaknesses
State Assessments (e.g. MEAP)	Yes	Yes
Teacher reports of student performance and progress, including grades	Yes	Yes
Classroom observations	Yes	Yes
Functional/Intellectual skills	Maybe, if needed to guide intervention	Maybe, if necessary to clarify pattern of strengths/weaknesses

What is considered an “intervention”?

Interventions are scripted protocols designed to target students’ deficit skill area. They are typically provided in a small group setting, with groups often meeting 3-5 times per week for 20-40 minutes. The interventions must supplement not supplant core instructional time. Focus should be given to interventions that are validated by research and evidence-based (based on what scientific research has indicated to work best in specific area), with fidelity checks to ensure intervention is being administered as designed. (page 13)

How long should an intervention last?

The timeline for decisions about the intervention outcome depends on the frequency of progress monitoring and the student's response to that intervention. Six to ten progress monitoring data points are usually recommended before making a decision regarding intervention effectiveness. If the student's rate of improvement is not adequate to achieve their performance goal, the intervention(s) must increase in intensity or change to a different intervention. If a child is showing adequate growth, interventions should be maintained and monitored through the Problem Solving Team, with the team determining when a "reasonable" amount of time and intensity have been directed at a specific student and the targeted skill, and whether lack of expected response has occurred (pg. 16).

Where can I find research-based interventions?

Scientifically validated interventions are expanding in availability, and often low intensity interventions are available at little to no cost. Whenever possible, interventions should be selected that are practical and time-effective so staff can more easily maintain treatment fidelity. (pg. 13). Resources are available that provide information and reviews regarding various interventions, such as the Florida Center for Reading Research (www.fcrr.org) and What Works Clearinghouse (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/). The Ingham ISD website provides another resource (www.inghamisd.org/programsandservices/rti/interventions). Additional resources for research-based interventions in literacy and math can be found in Appendices B, C, and D of the SLD Evaluation and Eligibility Guidelines.

How many interventions should be documented prior to a special ed referral?

A student may be referred to the MET team for consideration of special education eligibility after a minimum of **two** interventions have been tried and the child has demonstrated growth far below the typical (i.e., locally normal) age/grade level rate of acquisition.

How do we address the 30-day timeline that Michigan law requires for a special education evaluation?

Since evaluators for specific learning disabilities are required to include data from the RtI process as part of their comprehensive evaluation, it is **EXTREMELY** important that all SLD evaluators include themselves in the student's RtI process PRIOR to the start of the 30 day school day timeline that starts after consent has been signed. School psychologists and teacher consultants should be members of their school's problem solving team to assure they have input into these processes. If evaluating staff cannot be members of problem solving teams at the tier 2 problem solving level, they must be members at the tier 3 level. See guideline pages 12-16 for information on RtI tier 3 procedures. Also see appendix H on pages 40-41 for additional information through case study example.

How can we calculate rate of improvement?

Student progress must be monitored on a regular basis, using weekly or biweekly monitoring, and evaluators must use goals that consider the student's rate of improvement (ROI) to determine whether the student achieved adequate response to intervention. These rate of improvement (ROI) goals should be measured using standardized curriculum-based measures (CBM) administered at regular intervals (weekly, bi-weekly, etc.) using the following procedures:

1. Obtain a baseline score for the student using a CBM measure. The score must be within two weeks of when the progress monitoring period is scheduled to begin.
2. Determine the number of weeks the student will be monitored in response to an intervention.
3. Determine the weekly rate of improvement necessary for the student to achieve adequate response to intervention. This weekly rate of improvement can be obtained by:
    a. Look up the typical weekly rate of improvement by referring to the AIMSweb national norms table. Use this as your standard for the minimum rate of improvement to keep up with same-grade peers. To calculate a rate of improvement that will close the skill gap between the student and his/her peers, multiply the ROI score by 1.5 if using a tier 2 intervention or by 2.0 if using a tier 3 intervention.
    b. You may also use a researched-based rate of improvement criteria such as the Fuchs and Fuchs table listed on page 15 of the LD Guidelines for oral reading fluency words read correctly per one minute.
    c. If you are using DIBELS or another CBM vendor, take the beginning of the year Low Risk score for that vendor and subtract that from the end of the year benchmark score and divide by 36 (weeks in a school year). Multiply that number by 1.5 for tier 2 or by 2.0 for students receiving tier 3 interventions.

4. Multiply the weekly ROI goal by the number of weeks you have established for the intervention.

Please refer to the examples given on page 15 of the LD Guidelines and the example given in Appendix H on pages 40 and 41. Also refer to the NASP best practices article authored by Edward Shapiro in 2008 (http://www.nasponline.org/publications/booksproducts/BP5Samples/141_BPV122_8.pdf). Appendix H on pages 40 and 41. Also refer to the NASP best practices article authored by Edward Shapiro in 2008 (http://www.nasponline.org/publications/booksproducts/BP5Samples/141_BPV122_8.pdf).

How canwe assess fidelity of intervention implementation?

In order to make decisions about the effectiveness of an intervention it is imperative that it is delivered with fidelity. When the problem solving team drafts a plan for the intervention it should include details regarding fidelity checks (specifically who will do what and how often). The predetermined system should include regular observations by someone (colleague, administrator, support staff) who is knowledgeable about the intervention practice. Many publishers of instructional materials include specific checklists to help with systematic checks for intervention integrity. Additional checklists are available through the Florida Center for Reading Research at www.fcrr.org or the Ingham ISD.

What information needs to be communicated to parents throughout this process?

The school district must document that parents received specific information concerning their student's participation in any response to scientific, research-based intervention process. The information parents receive must include:

- Amount and nature of student performance data that will be collected and general education services that will be provided
- Strategies for increasing the student's rate of learning
- Parents' right to request an evaluation