

SLD Guidelines Update

In September 2010, Ingham ISD, in collaboration with school psychologists across the county, presented the document, “Specific Learning Disabilities Evaluation and Eligibility Guidelines”. This document was revised in March 2011 and was meant to be a living document to be revised as necessary. The 2010 guidelines shifted eligibility from an IQ-achievement discrepancy model to a pattern of strengths and weaknesses to determine eligibility of a specific learning disability. With the advances of research and practices in the field, we have learned the following:

1. Students have been found to be ineligible as a student with a learning disability because they do not have strengths. This is counter-intuitive in determining eligibility and need for services.
2. The current Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses model is not supported by experts in the field. Psychometric issues with discrepancy scores of any kind are well known, especially the use of rigid cut points, profile interpretations, difference scores, etc. In fact, the state of Florida, which is considered a leader in MTSS systems, prohibits its use.
3. Dr. Stevan Kukic, Director of School Transformation with NCLD presented at the MAASE conference recently and encouraged districts to move to an RTI model for determining SLD eligibility.

The SLD guidelines revision began during the 2013-14 school year. In the summer of 2014, after much research, it was determined that we would use the State of Wisconsin Guidelines as our template, which utilizes the RTI model for SLD identification. The team has been making revisions to fit Michigan law and language. While there is significant support from psychologists and researchers for this shift, there will be/are concerns from some school psychologists and local special education directors about having systems in place for implementing these new guidelines.

In reality, even with the pattern of strengths and weaknesses or the IQ achievement discrepancy model, there were challenges. We know in advance that Ingham ISD will need to present supports to schools to help assure core “appropriate instruction” is being provided at all levels and that scientific, evidence-based intervention is occurring prior to special education. The use of MTSS/RTI for determining eligibility yields better results for our students, more efficient use of resources, and is supported by research and will provide increased focus on MTSS and RTI efforts.

Ingham ISD is developing a strategic plan to support this work. Ingham is committed to working with both general and special education staff to improve our MTSS system and SLD identification model for both short and long term needs. We are currently meeting with a variety of groups to determine roll out needs. On January 16, Ingham is hosting a Psych PLC with a focus on the new guidelines for SLD eligibility. The core contents of the guidelines will be shared and input and needs will be discussed. Our goal is also to have strong communication of our efforts with teachers, principals, special education directors, curriculum directors and superintendents.

This change is happening throughout the country, and districts in Ingham ISD are well positioned to embark on this endeavor. Over the past 7 years, the districts in Ingham ISD have become leaders statewide (and nationally) in MTSS implementation. As the result of the hard work and collaboration, we celebrate significant improvements in student achievement. As the result of our countywide focus on building a MTSS system, we have effective new opportunities for data based decision making to improve our ability to meet the needs of all kids.

For further information about National Recommendations, go to the RTI Network website below:

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/getstarted/sld-identification-toolkit>

If anyone would like to discuss this further, they can contact Marcia O'Brien. Districts with school psychologist involvement on the committee include Ingham, Williamston, Stockbridge, Dansville, Webberville, Haslett, Waverly, Okemos and Holt.