**Specific Learning Disability (SLD)** **Questions and Answers**

**April 7th, 2022**

**1) What is an appropriate threshold to determine excessive absences?**

Before making the determination that a student has met SLD eligibility criteria, the team must consider the exclusionary factors listed in Standard 1400.60. Specifically, the team has to rule out the lack of instruction in math and reading as being the PRIMARY cause of the student’s lack of achievement. If the student’s attendance records indicate the student has had a pattern of excessive absences, the team should examine what role the absences may be playing in the student’s underachievement. If students are not attending school, they are missing out on critical instruction, especially in core content areas such as reading and math. In a policy update from the [National Association of State Boards of Education](https://www.nasbe.org/examining-chronic-absence-through-a-student-health-lens/?mc_cid=b5dec656ec&mc_eid=e1542678a3), it was shown that if a student is not in attendance at least 90% of the given school days, their learning is greatly impacted. A student who is in attendance 90% of 180 days would still be missing 18 school days per year. A key point to keep in mind when determining the impact of a student’s absences on achievement is that learning is individual and contextual to the learner. For some students, a few days of absences can greatly impact their achievement levels, whereas other students may miss a few days, and their achievement will not be impacted as much. Individuals are unique in their learning profiles and their regression levels. Each student’s attendance record should be analyzed within the context of the learner and within the context of the pattern of absences (when did the absences occur? Start of year, end of year, all throughout the year, over multiple years, just one year, early elementary during rapid growth of early literacy and math skills?) Teams are advised to align their consideration of the impact of attendance rates with the desired attendance rate established in their board policy. If the attendance rate of the student falls below the accepted attendance rate in their board policy, teams should analyze how the lack of attendance could be impacting the student’s ability to receive benefit from instruction in reading and math.

**2) I would like a better form for psychological processing deficits that is more in line with what you discussed today.**

Basic Psychological Processing (BPP) skills can be defined as a group of processes, organizations and functions the brain uses to take in information, process the information, and produce an output. A common model used to describe basic psychological processing skill set is: Input-Process-Output. Part of the IDEA SLD definition focuses on the deficit in the basic psychological processes, as BPP skills are directly connected to the way a student learns. BPP processes are directly linked to the various academic skill areas listed in the SLD subcategories (ie: Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, Math Calculation, etc.). Teams can assess a student’s level of BPP through various methods including: observations, BPP skill checklists, and classroom work samples. Norm referenced academic achievement assessments and cognitive ability assessments can also provide information regarding a student’s level of BPP functioning by analyzing performance on specific subtests/tests that heavily rely on specific BPP skills. Information regarding which BPP skills the different assessment tests/subtests utilize can be found in the manuals for each of the assessments (ie: Woodcock-Johnson IV Technical manual: Task Demands charts in Woodcock Johnson Technical Manual, Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement Manual: Demand of Analysis of Subtests).

Below are some resources that provide a wealth of charts, checklists and crosswalks between academic areas and processing skills:

a) [Psychological Processes Significantly Related with Specific Learning Disabilities](https://www.chino.k12.ca.us/cms/lib/CA01902308/Centricity/Domain/730/DEHN%20PPA) table

b) The [Idaho Department of Education: Cognitive Functioning and Psychological Processing Guidance](https://www.sde.idaho.gov/sped/sped-manual/files/chapters/chapter-4-evaluation-and-eligibility/Cognitive-Functioning-and-Psychological-Processing.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0ftdwCQylFGFAdfQO9NPusriBcmBO73iAVtUmfvZHKV2wDDFXY-G5FOlk) document provides definitions of psychological processing skills, common difficulties observed in the classroom and instructional strategies for elementary and secondary learners.

c) The Georgia Department of Education published a chart entitled [Processing Deficits, Accommodations and Specialized Instruction](https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/SDI-chart.pdf) linking the BPP deficits with observable and specific areas of academic weaknesses. It also contains suggestions for teaching strategies and accommodations to assist educators in planning instruction for students who may have weaknesses in the specific areas of Psychological Processing.

d) The Georgia [Department of Education](https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Vision/VI%20Consortia%201-27-17/GoIEP-Cognitive%20Functioning%20and%20Psychological%20Processing.pdf) has also published a chart, [Cognitive Functioning and Psychological Processing](https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Vision/VI%20Consortia%201-27-17/GoIEP-Cognitive%20Functioning%20and%20Psychological%20Processing.pdf), that provides a crosswalk between cognitive functioning and basic psychological processes. This chart also includes instructional suggestions to assist the learner.

e) The Maryland Association of School Psychology has developed a [teacher interview checklist of BPP skills](https://massp.org/downloads/osseo/Eval-Eligibility-Tools/Basic-Psychological-Processing-Checklist.pdf) observed in the classroom.

f) SELPA.org has a crosswalk between [speech & language tools and the relationship to cognitive/achievement tools](https://www.vcselpa.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=qJy3smhAvQ0%3d&portalid=0) to assist assessment teams in the knowledge surrounding different assessment tools

**3) Can you have observations completed before permission given on other areas of disability as well? I’m thinking of the Emotional Disturbance category**

Please see the [*Questions and Answers from the January 20, 2022 Zoom Support Meeting - Observations*](https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/observations-q-january-20-2022)*.* Questions one and two address observations conducted prior to the Review of Existing Data.

**4) Is there anything having a dyslexia diagnosis changes in regard to the process to determine eligibility? Or is this just another piece of the puzzle, and reason to suspect a disability?**

Dyslexia is a form of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) mentioned in both IDEA and the Missouri State Plan for Special Education. A diagnosis of dyslexia is one data source the team would need to consider when examining eligibility for SLD. However, a diagnosis of Dyslexia alone would not substantiate meeting all of the SLD criteria listed in the [1400’s section of the Standards and Indicators](https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/learning-disability-0). The student would still need to meet all of the criteria listed in the 1400’s in order to be found eligible under the category of SLD, including demonstrating adverse educational impact and the need for specially designed instruction.

**5) Does auditory processing fall under SLD?**

Perceptual disabilities, such as auditory processing and visual processing disorders are included in the SLD definition.

*Specific learning disability means 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 to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as* ***perceptual disabilities,*** *brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.* Missouri State Plan for Special Education, Regulation III

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) refers to the way the brain understands speech. Students with APD have hearing mechanisms that are intact and working properly, yet they have difficulty understanding spoken language. Students with APD often present difficulties understanding verbal information in the classroom setting. Typically, these students will exhibit difficulty when given tasks or assessments that involve listening comprehension and taking in information presented in a verbal format.

The American Speech and Hearing Association has a guidance document, [Understanding the Differences Between Auditory Processing, Speech and Language Disorders, and Reading Disorders](https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedFiles/Resource-for-DoJ-10-2014.pdf), that provides some additional information regarding APD.

**6) How can teachers assist students who are slow learners?**

The hallmark of ‘Specific’ Learning Disabilities is unexpected underachievement. When students are demonstrating academic skills which are generally commensurate with their measured ability level, yet those skills are still below what would be expected for their age or to meet grade level standards, they are going to need some type of support in order to facilitate continued learning. Special education was never designed to provide that support for all students in a school system who demonstrate difficulty learning. There are many research-based and evidence-based ways these students can and should be supported in the general education environment. One of the most effective supports would be through well-developed multi-tiered systems of support which would include strong tier one instruction and evidence-based interventions, possibly throughout the student’s school career. Another potential way to support all learners who struggle within a system would be to include the use of lesson planning principles supported by Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI) and High Leverage Teaching Practices (HLP’s).

**7) What to do with slow learners who may have 22 point discrepancy?**

When students whose cognitive assessment scores are outside of what would be considered the average range also have academic achievement scores that are 22 or more points below that cognitive score, the team should first examine the answers the student gave on those particular subtests to determine if the child actually made a valid attempt on the assessment. Anytime assessments result in scores that were not expected the scoring should be carefully scrutinized for errors. When scoring errors have been ruled out and the answers the student gave are supported by classroom performance and other evidence of this student’s ability, the team will have to determine whether or not this student satisfactorily meets the criteria to be identified as a student with a specific learning disability in the skill areas that are 22 points or below the measured cognitive ability. For more information please see the [April 2022 Myth of the Month](https://dese.mo.gov/sites/dese/files/media/file/2022/04/se_compliance_SLD_April_MOM_0.docx) over Specific Learning Disability, specifically myths three & ten.

**8) What about slow learners and the use of professional judgment?**

The use of professional judgment in any eligibility category is predicated on students' scores on the given assessments being close to meeting the actual criteria as outlined in the standards and indicators. This means the student would also be expected to be demonstrating patterns of strengths and weaknesses and have classroom evidence, as well as observations and progress monitoring evidence, which support the scores obtained through the assessment. Professional judgment is not a catch all or a way around the criteria. If the student’s academic achievement scores are commensurate with the cognitive assessment score for the student, using professional judgment to find the student eligible as a student with a specific learning disability would not be appropriate. For more information please see the [April 2022 Myth of the Month](https://dese.mo.gov/sites/dese/files/media/file/2022/04/se_compliance_SLD_April_MOM_0.docx) over Specific Learning Disability, specifically myth seven.