CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**The Bureau of Special Education's
18th Annual Back to School Event**

Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and SLD/Dyslexia Determination Process

September 9, 2022

Welcome and Introductions

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Special thanks are extended to:
- Paquita Jarman-Smith, SERC
- Dr. Christine Peck, Cooperative Educational Services
- Sheri Staranchak, EdAdvance
- Missy Wrigley, SERC

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Learning Targets

- Review the Federal and State requirements for determining eligibility and the existence of a SLD and the revised Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report (MER).

- Understand the **three common profiles of reading disabilities**, how the three profiles differ from each other, and some implications of the profiles for assessment and intervention.

- Understand **Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)** methods, how to use a PSW in SLD eligibility determinations, and some implications of PSW methods for assessment.

CT-SEDS IEP Preview Series

Mini-Series on SLD

- Session 1: Overview (Session 1 Slides)

- Session 2: Subject-Specific Worksheets (Session 2 Slides)

- Session 3: Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report (MER) (Session 3 Slides)

- Session 4: Understanding Common Profiles of Reading Disabilities (Session 4 Slides)
  NEW RESOURCE: *Three Reading Profiles*

- **COMING SOON:** Session 5: Understanding a Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)

Additional CT-SEDS Resources

CT-SEDS Documents/Templates

The following documents are intended to assist school districts with the CT-SEDS transition. Documents may be accessed and used to support staff training and/or Special Education processes.Please note that any information that is entered in these stand-alone documents must also be entered into CT-SEDS.

Referral and Evaluation

- Referral to Determine Eligibility for Special Education and Related Services
- Mathematics Worksheet
- Reading Worksheet
- Written Expression Worksheet
- MER for Students Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability - Initial Evaluation
- MER for Students Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability - Three-Year Reevaluation
- Mutual Agreement to Extend Evaluation Timeline for Determining Special Education Eligibility for a Student Suspected of Having a Specific Learning Disability

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Ask Questions

Throughout the presentation, please add questions to the Google Form.

Session A **(1:15-2:00)**
https://tinyurl.com/SLDsessionA

Session B **(2:15-3:00)**
https://tinyurl.com/SLDsessionB

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Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Definition of a SLD

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.

SLD does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disability, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

[34 CFR § 300.8(c)(10)]

8 Academic Domains of SLD:

Oral Expression, Listening Comprehension, Written Expression, Basic Reading Skills, Reading Fluency Skills, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics Calculation, Mathematics Problem Solving

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CSDE Working Definition of Dyslexia (Revised 2022)

Dyslexia is included in the IDEA as a specific learning disability (SLD). Dyslexia impacts reading, specifically decoding and accurate and/or fluent word recognition and spelling. Dyslexia is neurobiological in origin and is unexpected and/or inconsistent with a student's other abilities often despite the provision of appropriate instruction. Dyslexia *usually* results from a significant deficit in phonological processing (i.e., a persistent difficulty in the awareness of and ability to manipulate the individual sounds of spoken language).

Typically, students with dyslexia have strengths in areas such as reasoning, critical thinking, concept formation, problem solving, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and social communication (e.g., conversation). Early identification and appropriate instruction targeting the underlying phonological, word reading, and spelling deficits that characterize dyslexia may minimize its educational impact.

CSDE Working Definition of Dyslexia - Essential Clarifications

- Dyslexia is not *primarily* the result of visual, hearing, or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disability; a lack of appropriate instruction; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or limited English proficiency.
- Early identification of the characteristics of dyslexia is critical, leading to focused, evidence-based interventions, accommodations, self-awareness, self-empowerment, and school and life success.
- Without targeted, systematic and explicit instruction/interventions along with accommodations (e.g., accessible educational materials in content area subjects), students with dyslexia may have:
  - reduced reading experiences that may impact the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge,
  - difficulty with written expression, and/or
  - difficulty learning a second language.
- Students with dyslexia may demonstrate additional behavioral and/or emotional reactions to their difficulty with learning to read.
- Effective, research-based interventions for phonemic awareness and/or phonics may bring some students with dyslexia to grade expectations in those areas, but the students may still have lingering difficulties in reading fluency, spelling, and/or written expression, which may require intervention.

Federal and State Required Eligibility Criteria

A. The student **does not achieve adequately** for the student's age or to meet State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, and mathematics problem solving, when provided with appropriate learning experiences and instruction.

B. The student **does not make sufficient progress**, in the area(s) of concern, to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards, even with scientific, research-based interventions.
   or
   The student **exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses (PSW)** in performance, achievement, or both, in the area(s) of concern, relative to age or State-approved grade-level standards that is determined by the PPT to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments.

C. The student **has been provided appropriate instruction** (i.e., explicit and systematic instruction in the essential components of reading, math, and writing, delivered by qualified personnel).

D. The student **meets exclusionary factors** (i.e., the student's difficulties are not primarily the result of any of the following factors: visual, hearing, or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disability; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or limited English proficiency).

E. The **evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive** to appropriately identify all of the student's special education and related services, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category.

Federal and State Eligibility Determination Requirements

F. The PPT has reviewed **Section I. Required Evaluation Components and Section II. Eligibility Criteria** and has determined, in accordance with IDEA § 300.306(c)(1), that the student has a **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)** in the area identified below, *and requires special education and/or related services.*

⦿ Yes ◯ No

Academic skill area(s) the student is not achieving adequately ☐ mathematics calculation ☐ mathematics problem solving ☐ oral expression ☐ written expression ☐ listening comprehension ☑ reading comprehension ☑ reading fluency skills ☑ basic reading skills

Specification of Type of Reading Disability

To be completed if the PPT has determined that the student has a SLD in an **area of reading.**

The PPT has determined that the student has the following type of reading disability:

☐ mixed reading difficulties (MRD)

☐ specific reading comprehension difficulties (SRCD)

☑ specific word-recognition difficulties (SWRD)*

***The PPT has determined that the student has Specific Learning Disability/Dyslexia.** ◯ Yes ◯ No

G. The IQ/discrepancy (ability/achievement) model was not used to determine eligibility.*

*The PPT may request the administration of individual IQ tests if the PPT believes such tests could provide information that would be helpful in an evaluation.

H. A disorder in one of the basis psychological processes in understanding or using spoken or written language was not required as part of the eligibility decision.

The 3 Profiles Grow out of the Simple View of Reading (SVR)

Good reading comprehension requires competence in two broad areas:

- Word recognition/decoding
- Oral language comprehension

	WORD RECOGNITION Below Average	WORD RECOGNITION Average or Higher
ORAL LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION Average or Higher	Specific word recognition difficulties (SWRD)	Good reader
ORAL LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION Below Average	Mixed reading difficulties (MRD)	Specific reading comprehension difficulties (SRCD)

Profile 1: Specific Word Recognition Disabilities (SWRD)

- Student has difficulties with word recognition (e.g., real word reading, nonsense word reading, and/or automaticity of word reading).
- Broad oral language comprehension, including vocabulary knowledge, is average or higher.
- When reading text student can decode well, student's reading comprehension is good.
- Areas of difficulty on the MER include basic reading skills.
- Areas of difficulty do NOT include listening comprehension.
- Often these students will be identified with SLD/Dyslexia.

# Profile 2: Specific Reading Comprehension Disabilities (SRCD)

- Student has difficulties with reading comprehension that are NOT due to poor (inaccurate or nonautomatic) decoding.

- Often these problems are based in vocabulary/oral language comprehension.

- Areas of difficulty on the MER include reading comprehension, and sometimes, listening comprehension.

- Areas of difficulty do NOT include basic reading skills.

Profile 3: Mixed Reading Disabilities (MRD)

- Student has difficulties with reading comprehension that are based in BOTH word reading AND vocabulary/language comprehension.

- Reading comprehension problems exceed what can be explained by poor decoding.

- Example: a poor decoder has difficulties with reading comprehension even in decodable text, because of vocabulary limitations that affect comprehension.

- Another example: a poor decoder has comprehension difficulties that are evident not only in reading, but also during teacher read-alouds and oral discussions.

- Areas of difficulty on the MER include reading comprehension, basic reading skills, and sometimes, listening comprehension.

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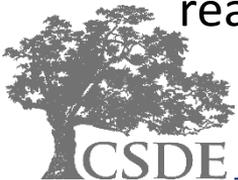
Assessments Needed to Identify the Profile

- Measures of out-of-context word recognition (real words) and nonsense word reading

- Desirable to assess automaticity as well as accuracy of word reading

- A measure of broad oral language comprehension (e.g., WJ Oral Comprehension, WIAT Oral Discourse Comprehension)

- A measure of oral vocabulary knowledge (e.g., WJ Picture Vocabulary, WIAT Receptive Vocabulary)

- A measure of reading comprehension

All tests cited here are just examples, please see the CSDE Assessment Resource Guide for many other appropriate measures of component reading and language skills.

- The previous assessments should be given in the context of a broader evaluation that also includes other important areas (e.g., reading fluency, spelling).

- In-depth speech/language evaluation by a Speech-Language Pathologist should be considered for students whose difficulties include oral language (listening) comprehension.

- If a speech/language evaluation is already available, it should be carefully considered in comprehensive evaluations for SLDs in reading.

Implications for Intervention

- ## Specific *Word Recognition* Difficulties (SWRD):
  - Interventions in basic phonics, decoding of multisyllabic words, automaticity of word reading, reading fluency, and spelling.

- ## Specific *Reading Comprehension* Difficulties (SRCD):
  - Interventions focused on the specific area(s) of comprehension in which individual students are weak (e.g., vocabulary, background knowledge, syntax, inferencing).

- ## Mixed Reading Difficulties (MRD):
  - Combination of the above interventions.

Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)

- Connecticut's revised eligibility criteria <u>does not require</u> documentation of a PSW in SLD eligibility determination, however documentation of a PSW is an alternative for Criterion B in Section II. of the revised MER (i.e., the student makes insufficient progress, even with SRBI, OR exhibits a PSW)
- PSW methods can focus on a variety of abilities
- PSW methods focused on IQ indices, IQ subtest performance, and other cognitive processing measures have limited relevance for instructional planning (Elliott & Roesing, 2015; Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2019)
- Little research on how PSW methods actually work and relate to instruction has been done (Schneider & Kaufman, 2017)
- PSW methods focused on academic-linguistic performance, as well as SLD identification methods involving RTI, are more educationally relevant than PSW approaches based on cognitive measures (Fletcher et al., 2019)

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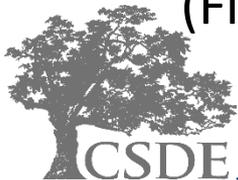
If a PSW is used in identification

Operational guidelines (e.g., Schulz, Simpson, & Lynch, 2013) suggest:

- Approximately 30 standard score points or more between strengths and weaknesses (whether using academic/linguistic or cognitive measures)
  AND
- Triangulating data from educational history, informal assessments, screening and progress monitoring, observations, etc.

A PSW should reflect consistency across the data and be supported by these different types of evidence.

PPT Considerations Regarding PSW

- A PSW is not required for a student to be identified as SLD or SLD/Dyslexia.
- Whether or not a student exhibits a PSW, all other eligibility criteria must be met, including low achievement.
- A PSW should not be primarily due to inadequate instruction.

Eligibility decisions are based on an individualized, comprehensive evaluation that considers an array of student data, not rote application of a formula.

PSW Example: Antoine, end of Grade 2
(A student with a PSW who is eligible under SLD criteria.)

- Antoine has struggled in reading since the beginning of kindergarten; he passed a kindergarten oral language screening
- Despite ample exposure to literacy at home and in preschool, he knew few letters upon entering K and had great difficulty learning letter-sound correspondences
- Phonemic awareness also was a serious problem, both in relation to phoneme blending and segmentation
- Antoine enjoys being read to and his comprehension during read-alouds continues to be at grade level or higher
- He had some initial difficulties with learning numbers in K but progressed much better in math than reading
- In both Grade 1 and 2, math skills seen as grade-appropriate, and he has met all Tier 1 benchmarks in math
- SRBI has focused on PA skills, phoneme-grapheme correspondences, and basic phonics skills
- Progress in SRBI has been slow and he is not on a trajectory to catch up

- WISC-V indices: Verbal Comprehension = 120; Visual Spatial = 105; Fluid Reasoning = 90; Working Memory = 76; Processing Speed = 70
- WJ-IV Reading subtests: Word Identification = 60; Word Attack = 64; Passage Comp = 50 (student reached a ceiling quickly on this subtest due to inability to read most words)
- WJ-IV Spelling = 58
- WJ Picture Vocabulary = 110
- WJ-IV Oral Comprehension = 115
- WJ-IV Math subtests: Calculation = 94; Applied Problems = 101
- Academic knowledge subtests all in average range

Antoine has a striking PSW, both in relation to his performance on WISC-V indices, and in relation to academic/linguistic performance (i.e., listening comprehension and math are much stronger than basic reading).

Federal and State Eligibility Criteria - Antoine

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Report (MER) Section II. SLD Eligibility Criteria	Criteria Met
A. The student **makes inadequate achievement** for the student's age or for meeting State-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas, when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the student's age or State-approved grade level standards. ☐ mathematics calculation ☐ mathematics problem solving ☐ oral expression ☑ written expression ☐ listening comprehension ☐ reading comprehension ☑ reading fluency skills ☑ basic reading skills	☑ Yes ☐ No
B. <mark>The student **makes insufficient progress** *in the area(s) identified above* to meet age or State-approved grade-level standards, even with scientific research-based interventions.</mark> Or <mark>The student **exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses** in performance, achievement, or both, *in the area(s) identified above,* relative to age or State-approved grade-level standards that is determined by the PPT to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments.</mark>	☑ Yes ☐ No
C. The student **has been provided appropriate instruction** (i.e., explicit and systematic instruction in the essential components of reading, math, and writing), delivered by qualified personnel.	☑ Yes ☐ No
D. The student **meets exclusionary factors** (i.e., the student's difficulties are not primarily the result of: a visual, hearing, or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disability; cultural factors; environmental or economic disadvantage; or limited English proficiency.)	☑ Yes ☐ No
E. The **evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive** to appropriately identify all of the student's special education and related services, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category.	☑ Yes ☐ No
F. The PPT has reviewed **Section I. Required Evaluation Components and Section II. Eligibility Criteria** and has determined, in accordance with IDEA § 300.306(c)(1), that the student **has a Specific Learning Disability (SLD***) in the area identified below**, **and requires special education and/or related services. services**. ☑ written expression ☑ reading fluency skills ☑ basic reading skills Specification of Type of Reading Disability: **specific word-recognition difficulties (SWRD)** **The PPT has determined that the student has Specific Learning Disability/Dyslexia.**	☑ Yes ☐ No ☑ Yes ☐ No

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Antoine Meets SLD Criteria Because:

- He has very low achievement in basic reading skills and spelling
- Reading comprehension also very low but his difficulties here are clearly due to word reading, not language comprehension; reading fluency could not even be tested because of his inability to read words
- He is making inadequate progress in SRBI <u>and</u> has a PSW
- However, he would meet Criterion B for SLD eligibility just based on the PSW alone, even if progress in SRBI was deemed adequate; and vice versa (i.e., just based on limited progress in SRBI)
- His difficulties are not primarily due to exclusionary factors such as another disability, cultural factors, lack of instruction, etc.
- Additional considerations: Further testing with the CTOPP documented severe phonological weaknesses (all composites < 75); Spelling negatively impacts written expression
- Antoine's profile is one of SWRD; he has severe SLD/dyslexia

More about Antoine's PSW

- Cognitive PSW (Verbal Comprehension = 120, Processing Speed = 70, Working Memory = 76) supports findings in reading, showing that oral comprehension is a strength for Antoine but WM and PS are weaknesses (consistent, e.g., with CTOPP composites)
- However, the academic/linguistic PSW is much more helpful for educational planning
- Academic/linguistic PSW is much more informative for an identification of dyslexia
- Academic/linguistic PSW is much more informative about areas that need to be addressed in special education: phonemic awareness, basic reading skills, spelling
- Academic/linguistic PSW clarifies that his low reading comprehension score is not due to comprehension but to word reading
- Academic/linguistic PSW also provides insights about strengths that can be tapped in instruction and in determining appropriate accommodations, e.g., oral presentation of content
- **Note that assessment and analysis of struggling students' academic/linguistic skills is helpful for ALL students, whether or not they have a PSW**

Summary

- The revised MER, which summarizes Federal and State evaluation components and eligibility criteria requirements, includes two changes: the option for PPTs to use a PSW when determining eligibility and, for students with SLD in reading, the requirement that PPTs specify the student's type of reading disability.

- The three reading profiles include: SWRD, SRCD, and MRD.
- To identify the profile, assessments of out-of-context word recognition and decoding, oral vocabulary knowledge, broad oral language comprehension, and reading comprehension are needed.
- Information about a student's profile is very useful for planning intervention.

- PSW methods can focus on a variety of abilities.
- A PSW is not required for a student to be identified as SLD or SLD/Dyslexia.
- Whether or not a student exhibits a PSW, all other eligibility criteria must be met, including low achievement.
- A PSW should not be primarily due to inadequate instruction.
- Eligibility decisions are based on an individualized, comprehensive evaluation that considers an array of student data, not rote application of a formula.

Questions

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For more information, please visit the **CSDE SLD and SLD/Dyslexia** webpage.