



# **NASET's Assessment in Special Education series**

## **Required Responsibilities in Screening and Assessment of Students**

### **Introduction**

As part of the role of special educator, you may be called upon with other staff members to test students lacking intellectual or academic information in their files, or high-risk students for a suspected disability. These forms of testing require several different procedures and may range from the gathering of basic academic, behavioral, and intellectual levels to a more comprehensive assessment for participation in special education. You will also need to be aware that these procedures involve tests that may require a parent's permission so check with the district policy. There are three procedural forms of testing that you will need to understand. In these cases, the special education teacher would be used as the educational evaluator (educational diagnostician). This role may require assessment in a variety of settings:

### **A-Screening Assessments**

**1-Screening students for basic skill levels:** Screening measures, by definition, are typically very brief assessments of a particular skill or ability that is highly predictive of a later outcome. Screening measures are designed to quickly sort students into one of two groups: 1) those who require intervention and 2) those who do not. There may be times when information on a new student or existing student may be missing in academic and intellectual areas. While necessary to get a baseline and determine possible expectations, these screening tests cannot be used for diagnosis of a more serious issue or used to classify a student for special education. While other staff members may do other forms of screening i.e. progress monitoring (Progress monitoring is used to assess students' academic performance, quantify their rates of improvement or

progress toward goals, and determine how they are responding to instruction. You can use progress monitoring for individual students or for an entire class) and diagnostic screening (Renaissance Edwords, 2021), the specific goal in educational screening is to gather information on a child to determine levels of ability.

**2-What are academic screening tools:** According to the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, (2021) screening tools are brief, reliable, and valid assessments used to assist educators with identifying students who are at-risk or not at risk for specific academic difficulties and or dyslexia. Universal screening tools have the following characteristics:

- Quick and targeted assessments of discrete skills that indicate whether students are making adequate progress in reading achievement
- Alternate equivalent forms so they can be administered three to four times a year
- Standardized directions for administration and scoring
- Established reliability and validity standards Culturally and linguistically responsive for diverse students

The use of screening measures may increase in frequency due to the recent pandemic where teachers may not have the most recent ability levels for children with special needs. The loss of instruction due to COVID-19 closures and the loss of spring testing data creates a perfect storm for school psychologists who wish to meet the needs of diverse learners, including identifying and making eligible those students who are in need of special education (NASP, 2021).

**3-Use of Screening Tools:** If there are indications that something more serious is possible a referral should be made for a more comprehensive assessment. However, if gathering of basic information is required, the Informal screening tools may include but not limited to the following:

- **Abbreviated intelligence tests or selected subtests:** In the sphere of education, the rapid and reliable evaluation of a child's global intellectual capacity is important for an efficient identification of intellectually gifted children (IGC). Indeed, such evaluation contributes in proposing specific educational programs (e.g., accelerated or enrichment programs). In this context, a short evaluation can initially be used to assess a child's intellectual giftedness. It

can then serve to determine whether a more in-depth evaluation of the child's cognitive and socioemotional characteristics is needed (Aubry & Bourdin, 2018).

- **Informal reading inventories:** An informal assessment of reading inventory, including what the assessment measures, when it should be assessed, examples of questions, and the age or grade at which the assessment should be mastered.
- **Selected subtests of achievement or language:** Since many achievement tests contain standardized subtests, you may be able to use specific subtests to measure a specific content area since scores can be obtained separately on each subtest.
- **Checklists:** These screening measures are frequently used to get a subjective analysis of behavioral assessment on a child. A checklist is a list of actions, responses, or other behaviors that are to be recorded each time they are observed, as by an experimental investigator, study participant, or clinician (APA, 2021).
- **Observation scales:** According to Newman, (2013), direct observation scales are structured instruments used to collect first-hand information regarding observable behaviors. They contrast to scales that provide indirect accounts, such as rating scales, report forms, or interviews with parents, caregivers, or teachers regarding behaviors of an individual, although both provide important information. Direct observation scales are critical in both diagnosis and intervention with children with autism spectrum disorders.
- **Rating scales:** A rating scale is a closed-end survey question that is used to evaluate how survey responders feel about a particular product or statement along a continuum of a scale or word labels. For instance, responders may be asked to choose between a range of numbers with explanations i.e. 1 Always, 2 Most of the Time, 3-Some of the time 4-Almost never and 5-Never. Rating scales are popular for their ability to allow quantitative measures to be applied to more abstract, subjective sentiments. Satisfaction, experience, perception, and feeling are all difficult to quantify, but when done well, a rating scale is useful for measuring performance or effectiveness and has application in personality research (Ohlson, 2021)

If the screening plus other forms of assessment, observation, and historical patterns in performance determines the possibility of a suspected disability, then the CST must make a more formal referral to the district's multidisciplinary team for a comprehensive assessment.

According to the National Center on Improving Literacy (2021) Screening is an assessment

process that helps teachers identify students who are at risk for not meeting grade-level learning goals. Screening assessments in the classroom work the same way doctors conduct health screenings to check your body for warning signs to see if you currently have a health condition or might be at risk for a one. Think about eye check-ups. If you can't read the chart, then the doctor is likely to give you contact lenses or glasses so that you can see more clearly. If you can read the chart, then the doctor will send you on your way until your next eye check-up, or screening.

A complete list of tests used to screen students' abilities can be found at:

[Academic Screening Tools Chart \(intensiveintervention.org\)](http://charts.intensiveintervention.org)

<http://charts.intensiveintervention.org/ascreening>

This tools chart has three tabs that include ratings on the technical rigor of the tools: (1) Classification Accuracy, (2) Technical Standards, and (3) Usability Features.

## **B-Triennial Evaluation**

**General Overview:** Under IDEA, a student must be re-evaluated at least every three years. This is known as a triennial evaluation and review. The purpose of the triennial review is to find out:

- if the student continues to be a "student with a disability," as defined within the law, and
- the student's present educational needs.

The re-evaluation is like the initial evaluation (an evaluation on a student who has never been referred for special education). It begins by looking at the information already available about the student. More information is collected only if it's needed. If the group decides that additional assessments are needed, the parent/guardians must give their informed written permission before the school system may collect that information. The school system may only go ahead without their informed written permission if they have tried to get the parent/guardians' permission and they did not respond.

Although the law requires that students with disabilities be re-evaluated at least every three years, the student may be re-evaluated more often if the parent/guardians or their student's teacher(s) request it.

The team that will reevaluate the student may vary depending on the information already obtained, the age of the student, and state guidelines. For instance, if a student has had several intelligence tests over the years, the Eligibility Committee may not require a new one if the results have been consistent from test to test. Therefore, the psychologist may not be involved with this area. It is best to ask the chairperson of the Eligibility Committee or a member of the assessment team which professionals will be doing the assessment and what areas they will be evaluating i.e. the special education teacher may be evaluating reading, math, spelling, and writing levels, along with processing ability.

- **Parental Participation During the Triennial Evaluation:** Once the Triennial Evaluation is complete and the report generated, the parent/guardian should hear from a member of the assessment team who will set up a meeting to go over the results. In some districts this may occur prior to the Annual Review and in others it may occur at the Annual Review if it is also a Triennial year. The parent/guardian should ask the team members when they will be hearing about the results when they are brought in for an update of information from the last testing. They may also contact the chairperson of the Eligibility Committee and ask when they should expect to hear the results of the Triennial Evaluation.

The role of the special education evaluator in the triennial process would include an assessment of present academic levels of performance. These areas may include reading, mathematics, writing, spelling, language, and any other areas deemed necessary to get a comprehensive understanding of the student's present levels. While other tests may be given by other professionals, these are the areas that are the focus of the educational evaluator. (Note: See Chapter \_\_\_ for specific preparation and presentation of this process).

### **Pearson eText Video Example 8.1**

Carefully review the video titled "IEP Basics: Triennial Evaluation," and listen to the process and reasons for providing this type of evaluation to students in special education. Consider your role in this process and what information you would need to gather along the way.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ces1vZbwcjM>

## C-Initial Evaluation

When a school identifies a child as having a suspected disability and that child has never been referred to special education before, the comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility is called the initial evaluation. It should be a complete and individualized assessment using a variety of methods and a multidisciplinary team of professional to gather academic, functional, and developmental information about the child.

- **Evaluation procedures:** In this evaluation no single test can be used to determine the eligibility or diagnosis of a disability. This is a comprehensive assessment and the standardized and non-standardized tests and measures that will be used must be proven to measure the skills they claim to be testing. If any nonstandard conditions are involved, such as using an interpreter to communicate with the child, this will be mentioned in the written report.

In addition, the tests and procedures that will be used must:

- Not be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis
- Be given in the child's native language or other mode of communication unless clearly not feasible to do so
- Measure a disability and not limited English language skills
- Provided by trained personnel
- Not culturally or linguistically biased

A member of the multidisciplinary team other than your child's teacher will observe the child's academic performance in his/her regular class as part of the evaluation.

- **Purpose of an initial evaluation:** The purpose of the initial evaluation is to decide if the child is a "child with a disability." To do so, the child must meet two requirements:
  1. Fit the defined criteria under IDEA 2004 for at least one of these disabilities:
    - Autism
    - Deaf-blindness

- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment
- In addition, states may choose to identify kids aged 3-9 as having developmental delays, but they do not have to

2. And, exhibit significant levels of academic, intellectual, behavioral, or medical deficiencies because of the disability, to require special education and related services to benefit from the educational program. Once these comprehensive assessments are completed and shown to diagnose a disability, they are presented to the Eligibility Committee for a decision on special education.

- **Determination of the Multidisciplinary Team Members Involved in the Comprehensive Assessment:** The team assigned to this procedure is the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) and the selected members of this team may vary depending on the suspected disability being evaluated., the team designated to do the formal comprehensive testing will be different. The following members may be selected to evaluate the child indicated by the suspected disability listed. However, other qualified professionals may be added as determined by the ongoing assessment process.

### **Suspected area of Disability**

### **Possible MDT Team Membership**

#### **Learning Disability**

School psychologist, special education evaluator, occupational therapist,

neurologist, psychiatrist, parent and child if over the age of 14

**Autism**

Developmental pediatrician, school psychologist, special education evaluator, audiologist, speech and language therapist, behavioral consultant, occupational therapist, life skills consultant, social worker, parent and child if over the age of 14

**Emotional Disturbance**

Psychiatrist, school psychologist, special education evaluator, behavioral consultant, parent and child if over the age of 14

**Intellectual Disability**

School psychologist, special education evaluator, life skills specialist, Behavioral consultant, occupational therapist, parent and child if over the age of 14

**Hearing Impaired**

Speech and language therapist, audiologist, school psychologist, special education evaluator, occupational therapist, An otolaryngologist (a physician who provides medical and surgical care, diagnosis, and treatment of the ear, nose, throat, and neck), parent and child if over the age of 14

**Visual Impairment**

School psychologist, special education evaluator, ophthalmologist, occupational therapist, orientation and mobility therapist, parent and child if over the age of 14

**Orthopedic Impairment**

Qualified medical doctor, physical therapist, occupational therapist, school psychologist, special education evaluator, parent and child if over 14 years of age.

**Other Health Impairment**

Qualified medical doctor, physical therapist, occupational therapist, school psychologist, special education evaluator, parent and child if over 14 years of age.

**Traumatic Brain Injury**

NOTE: While this injury may have dramatic effects on impaired functioning throughout the body, the team for this evaluation may be expansive and possibly include: Aquatic therapist, case manager/social worker, kinesiotherapist, massage therapist, neurologist, neuropsychologist, occupational therapist, physiatrist, physical therapist, primary care provider, rehabilitation nurse, rehabilitation psychologist, recreational therapist, speech-language pathologist, school psychologist,

special education evaluator, parent and child  
if over the age of 14

- **Forms of Assessment Required for an Initial Evaluation:** Since this type of comprehensive assessment has profoundly serious impact on the educational direction of a child it is vital that the most recent up-to-date measures provided by a variety of professionals be used to make this diagnosis of a disability. In the case of the special education evaluator there are two areas that may need to be addressed in the educational evaluation of the child. Depending on the needs and policy of the district the areas covered may include the following:

A complete achievement battery (group of tests) including but not limited to:

- **Reading test:** measuring phonics, phonemic awareness (sounds, syllables and words), vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension.
- **Math test:** depending on the age of the child many areas would need to be evaluated such as Basic Concepts (Numeration, Algebra, Geometry, Measurement, Data Analysis and Probability); Operations (Mental Computation and Estimation; Written Computation; Addition and Subtraction; Multiplication and Division); Applications (Applied Problem Solving, Foundations of Problem Solving)
- **Spelling Test:** A written and visual spelling test (choosing the correct word from 4 visually presented words) may be given to see if visual motor issues are interfering in the child's spelling performance. A high score on a visual test and low on written spelling may indicate other factors other than spelling may be the root cause of difficulties in this area.
- **Oral Language:** In the broadest definition, oral language consists of six areas: phonology, grammar, morphology, vocabulary, discourse, and pragmatics. The acquisition of these skills often begins at a young age, before students begin focusing on print-based concepts such as sound-symbol correspondence and decoding.

- **Written Language:** Student writing can be evaluated on five product factors: fluency, content, conventions, syntax, and vocabulary. Writing samples also should be assessed across a variety of purposes for writing to give a complete picture of a student's writing performance across different text structures and genres ([Isaacson, 2021](#))

Secondly, if required the educational evaluator may be asked to perform a complete perceptual evaluation. The specific areas measured in this evaluation are described at length in Chapter \_\_\_\_ and the specific tests used to measure these areas are described in Chapter \_\_\_\_)

Please be aware that this type of assessment will always require a signed release for testing prior to any involvement with the student. Further, to avoid any linguistic or cultural bias or concerns, you must provide if necessary, all forms in the parent's native language or use an interpreter with the forms.

### **Pearson eText Video Example 8.2**

Carefully review the video titled "IDEA Basics: Initial Evaluation," and listen the factors that go into the process of identifying, assessing and classifying a child for special education. Make sure you focus on the legal factors that need to be considered and parent's rights in this process.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiAlJvcyQrUvy>

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The three types of assessments explained in this chapter provide necessary information on a child that will assist in the positive assessment, placement, remediation and support for a child with special needs. Knowing which type of assessment is called for and what is involved is the responsibility of any special educator in today's schools. If you are called on to do these types of evaluations, you will want to make sure you follow all the required

procedures and cover all the areas to properly provide the best diagnostic outcome for the child and the parents.