

# C-SEP 2.0: Is it Core-Selective or Selective- Core? .... It's Both!

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Special Ed Teacher  
Educational  
Diagnostician  
University Professor  
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Consultant and  
Trainer  
Author C-SEP

**Research/Focus:**  
Professional Judgment  
Behavior  
Best Practices in Assessment  
RTI/MTSS  
PSW  
Intellectual Development



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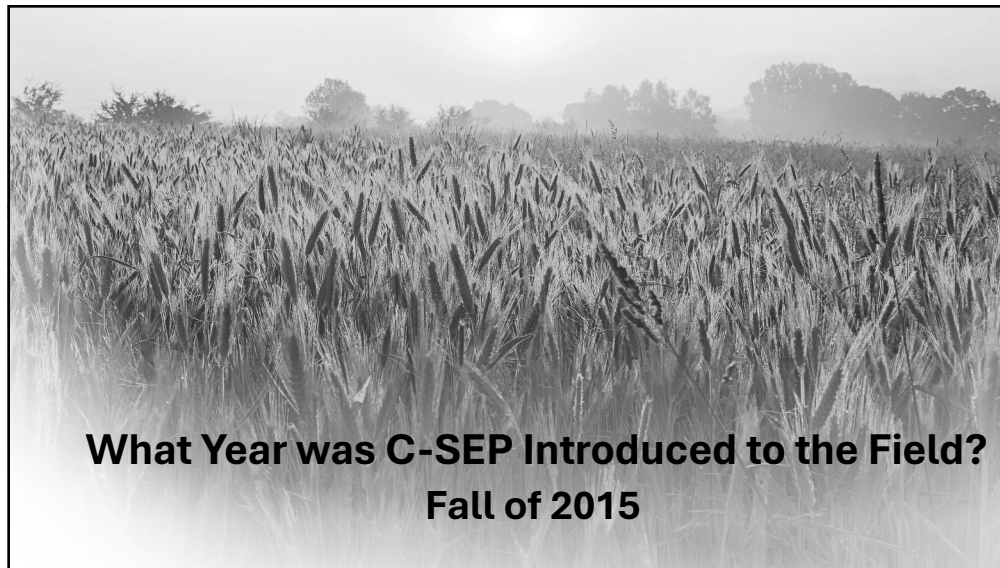
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## Agenda

- Hats off to TEA for assisting with the policy-to-practice gap by providing clear guidance – Policy Review
- We want to show how C-SEP aligns with the SLD Guidance Document (2025) or, more accurately, how the SLD Guidance Document aligns with C-SEP (2015-2025).
- We want you to use C-SEP practices with confidence
- 10 years of C-SEP!
- Let's talk about the guidance document, then get C-SEP-specific
- C-SEP 2.0 Test Selection and Case Study



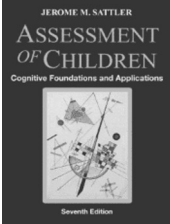
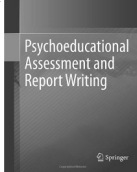
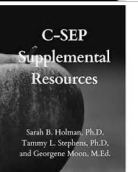
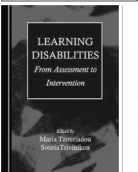
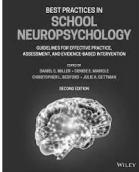
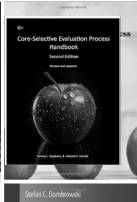
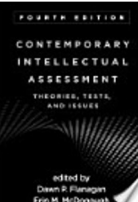
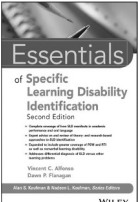
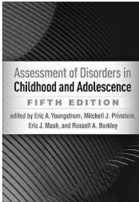
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**What Year was C-SEP Introduced to the Field?**  
**Fall of 2015**

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### Core-Selective Evaluation Process (C-SEP)



- Introduced in Fall 2015
- Accepted Practice (10 years)
- Increasing in use
- Simplify SLD identification
- Held up to scrutiny
- Used in Utah, WV, California
- Department of Defense

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### C-SEP 2.0 Defined (More on this later!)

Expands on C-SEP and what we have trained for years (2015-2025)

C-SEP is a tightly woven collection of best practices for organizing assessments that identify, explain, and understand learning disabilities, leading to better interventions and outcomes for students with specific learning disabilities.

C-SEP 2.0 represents some significant shifts:

|                                                                                                                      |                                                          |                                                              |                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased emphasis on "Using learning data (poor instructional response) to identify and using tests to understand." | Core-Selective Testing (Publishers guide test selection) | Selective-Core (The evaluator selects targeted "core" tests) | Manifestations are the most important aspects to measure and understand |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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We have always recommended **using tests to explain and understand learning.**

- *Children with SLD present a much more **intricate set of needs** beyond just the cognitive domain and require a multifaceted approach to **thoroughly understand the instructional implications** (Schultz & Stephens, 2015)*
- *A distinguishing feature of C-SEP is that it goes **beyond a cognitive explanation to explain underachievement** (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).*
- *In C-SEP, the **basis of the data analysis** is the **understanding of relationships between cognition, language, and academics at a much deeper level to better understand the learner** (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).*

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## Significant Variance and Discrepancy have Never Been a part of C-SEP

- When “achievement” tests are properly used as they have been validated (i.e., **academic skill paired with a cognitive process**), a discrepancy between cognition and achievement is of limited value (Schultz et al., 2021).
- **Standard scores are never used as the sole determinate** of a discrepancy or variance with a cognitive or language measure (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).
- **Interpreting the data** is done through **the PSW lens instead of a discrepancy lens** (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).

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## “Beyond the Scores” has always been a theme

The C-SEP approach addresses these questions concerning precision and efficiency; rather than pursue cohesiveness, the C-SEP approach suggests going beyond standard score analysis and instead interpret and investigating at the test and task demand level (Schultz & Stephens, 2015)

When comparing the C-SEP approach to discrepancy SLD identification models, these interpretations are much deeper and go beyond the eligibility decision (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).

While its design does reduce test administration time, its purpose is to use data and professional judgment to improve the depth of the evaluation beyond test scores (Schultz & Stephens, 2017)

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## C-SEP and Multiple Sources of Data

- This requires the use of **multiple measures** to determine if the student is **achieving adequately** (e.g., Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM), Curriculum-Based Assessment (CBA), state testing, grades, work samples, etc.) (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).
- **Multiple measures and data sources** are used to determine if the student is achieving or underachieving academically (e.g., Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM), Curriculum-Based Assessment (CBA), state testing, grades, work samples, etc.). Academic underachievement is established using multiple sources of actual achievement data collected over time and under varying conditions (Schultz & Stephens, 2018).

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## Major Themes of SLD Guidance Document



Emphasis on Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT); 95 times (Candace Vielma, 2025)



Limitations of Norm-referenced test (especially cognitive)



Learning data required, norm-referenced tests are optional



Multiple sources of data



Impact Statements

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A single professional does not conduct evaluations. MDT members are responsible for ensuring all legal standards required for conducting an FIE are followed (p. 15).

“The evaluation is not the sole responsibility of an educational diagnostician [evaluator].”

“Just because the referral packet is submitted to the evaluator, it does not mean that the remainder of the MDT team is exonerated of their responsibilities.”

Stephens & Schultz, 2015-2025

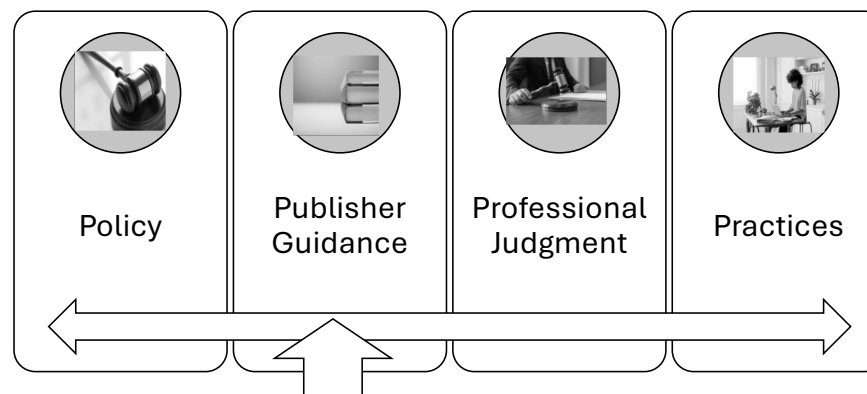
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## Tests are administered according to instrument instructions (p. 8)

- Statistical analysis uses actual norms and software/tables from the publisher (Schultz & Stephens, 2018).
- Statistical analysis using publisher calculations informs decision-making and professional judgment instead of being the determinate factor of the eligibility decision (Schultz & Stephens, 2018).
- “Select and administer the core set of cognitive tests. The publisher manuals should guide the selection of all core tests. (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).
- Statistical analysis is conducted using actual norms and software/tables from the publisher (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).

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## The 4 Pillars of C-SEP



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It is important to gather information and data from several sources to ensure the evaluation is comprehensive and to provide evidence to support conclusions. Identifying if the student is underachieving in one or more areas is based on **the preponderance of data** rather than a single score or piece of information (p. 9) .

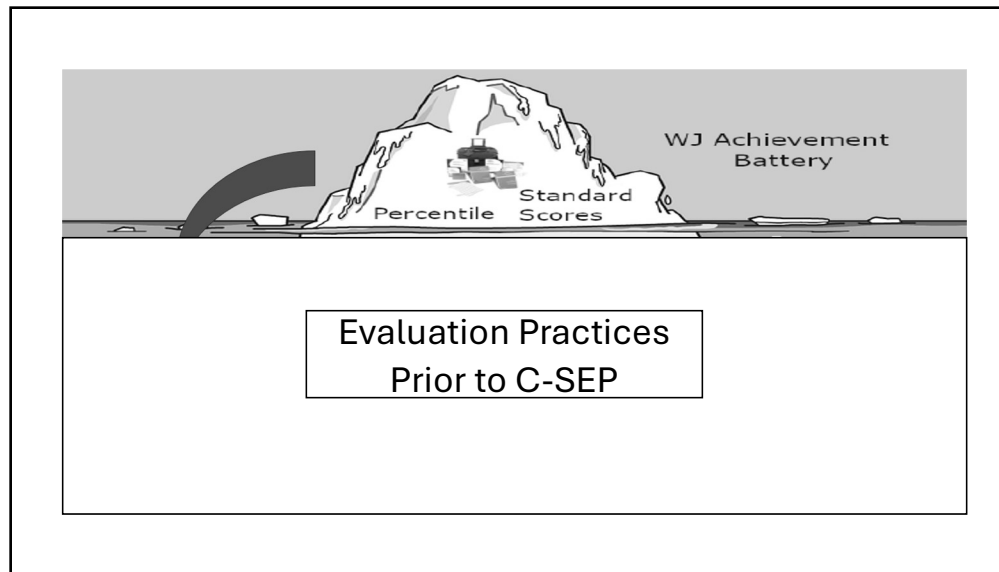
- Academic underachievement is determined using **multiple sources of actual achievement data** (e.g., curriculum-based assessments, assessments based on state standards, work samples, classroom data, etc.)(Schultz & Stephens, 2017)
- “For example, **actual achievement data** (work samples, writing samples, tests of standards) is authentic assessment data and is valuable for guiding future instruction as the student is expected to master similar tasks in the future (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).
- To reiterate, when using C-SEP, the data collected must converge, and the **preponderance of data** must be consistent and relevant to identifying SLD (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).

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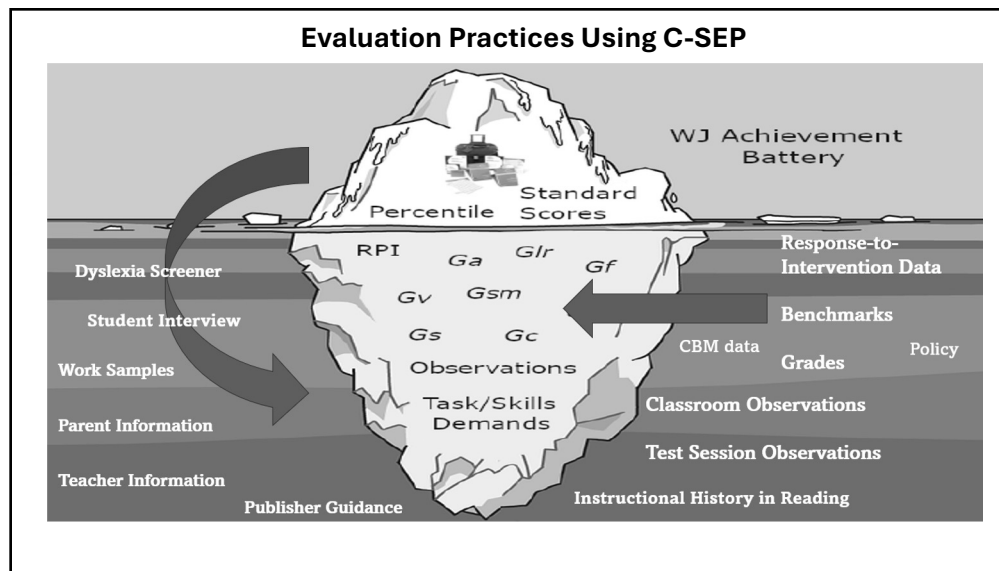
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- An SLD designation is based on a **preponderance of evidence** using integrated data analysis (Schultz & Stephens, 2024)
- The decision is ultimately one of professional judgment using the **preponderance standard** (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).
- Once the tests have been administered and scored, all collected data should be compared and contrasted using **integrated data analysis techniques**. Integrated data analysis is the analysis of multiple data sets (e.g., norm-referenced test results, RTI data, criterion-referenced test, etc.) that have been pooled into one (Schultz & Stephens, 2015).

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What exactly does 'preponderance of data' mean? In legal terms, preponderance refers to a fact that is proven more probable than not. (Merriam-Webster.com). In the case of SLD identification, does the preponderance (or majority) of evidence indicate that an SLD is more probable than not? (p. 10)

- Oxford defines **preponderance** as "the quality or fact of being greater in number, quantity, or importance." "Preponderance" has a legal meaning as well as a burden of proof that states, "**more likely to occur than not**" (Preponderance of the evidence, n.d. 2023) (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).



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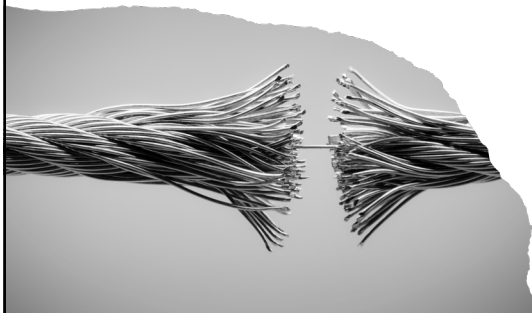
This graphic shows that equal weight, or consideration, is given to informal information (e.g., observations, interviews, parent and teacher information), curriculum-based tools and assessment measures, and information from criterion-referenced tests and norm-referenced tests (p. 10)



- "At a minimum, the informal data **set is equal** to, and in some cases **better than**, norm-referenced testing data (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).
- "Achievement," or adequate progress toward state standards, is best assessed using data sources (e.g., state test, work samples, progress reports, and **curriculum-based assessments**.; Schultz et al., 2021)

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The MDT ***should not rely*** on interpretative models or processes that exclude evidence of a disability based on predetermined score profiles or **cut-off scores** (p. 10)



- The approach differs from the other models mentioned because a profile analysis of the psychological processes is conducted rather than a particular standard score discrepancy **cut-off** (Schultz & Stephens, 2018).
- The C-SEP approach is driven by professional judgment and does not use rigid **cut-off** points or a statistical formula as a determinate of SLD (Schultz & Stephens, 2018).
- When using a PSW approach such as C-SEP, proficiency scores are better able to establish an individual's learning profile than simply using standard score **discrepancy analysis** (Shrank, Stephens, & Schultz, 2017).
- C-SEP does not rely on a **“smoking gun” or arbitrary cut-offs** to identify SLD; instead, it is done with careful analysis of each data source, understanding the data limitations, and adhering to the state criteria (Schultz & Stephens, 2024)

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Assessments that measure aspects of cognitive functioning may be used to **rule out intellectual disabilities** or to **inform educational decisions** by documenting areas in which the student is struggling or excelling (p. 13).

- Simply using individualized norm-referenced tests to obtain scores to run statistical analysis leads to superficial analyses and diminishes the interpretive value of the tests. **Statistics should inform professional decision-making instead of being the determinant factor** (Schultz and Stephens, 2017)
- The C-SEP approach is driven by professional judgment and does not use rigid cut-off points or a statistical formula as a determinate of SLD. It **instead informs decision-making and provides** statistical support to consider when making the determinations (Schultz & Stephens, 2018).



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Formal cognitive testing is not a requirement for an SLD evaluation. The MDT may include cognitive assessments as part of the overall evaluation to help determine strengths and weaknesses. Cognitive scores should not be used in isolation from other data sources to make eligibility recommendations (p. 13).

- Since no cognitive processing ability exists in isolation this translates into an **increase in ecological validity as students in a classroom** are using many cognitive processes simultaneously to learn (Schultz & Stephens, 2015)
- In addition, looking at documented patterns of learning and behavioral difficulties over time can help the **examiner establish ecological validity** with current assessment results (Stephens, Olvera, & Schultz, 2022)
- For example, a norm-referenced math test usually measures a relatively limited number of subskills in one administration. The formative and historical data set will no doubt have many more skills than the norm-referenced test, and since it is actual achievement data, it will have greater **ecological validity** (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).

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In some cases, sufficient information may be available from sources such as academic performance data, behavioral observations, and input from parents and teachers to make an informed decision about identification **without the need** for standardized measures (p. 21).

- A simple example is as follows: a 4th grade student who has passed his reading state tests, earns good grades in reading, and has an educational history of progressing normally in reading **does not require an individual norm-referenced academic assessment** (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).
- The formative and historical data set will no doubt have many more **skills than the norm-referenced** test, and since it is actual achievement data, it will have greater ecological validity (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).

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In some cases, sufficient information may be available from sources such as academic performance data, behavioral observations, and input from parents and teachers to make an informed decision about identification without the need for standardized measures (p. 21).

- **By not testing in areas in which sufficient data exists and fully exploiting all of the features of a test,** the selective feature of C-SEP allows the examiner to be more comprehensive in the area of need (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).

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There are instances where standardized measures can provide valuable insights into a student's achievement and processes that may not be apparent through other means. These measures can help identify strengths and weaknesses in different achievement and cognitive domains, informing instructional planning and support strategies (p. 21).

- *This type of data analysis (integrated data analysis) is particularly order to understand the learner and inform interventions (Schultz & Stephens, 2015).*
- *Choose the appropriate test to further investigate the cognitive process if unable to determine if this construct is intact. Further analyze the results to gain insight into the student's functioning (Schultz & Stephens, 2015).*



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There are instances where standardized measures can provide **valuable insights** into a student's achievement and processes that may not be apparent through other means. These measures can help identify strengths and weaknesses in different achievement and cognitive domains, informing instructional planning and support strategies (p. 21)

Instead, using norm-referenced tests helps explain the lack of appropriate progress and gain a deeper insight into learning (Schultz & Stephens, 2024).

Another reason to use selective testing procedures may be to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between a cognitive area and achievement area (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).

Standard scores obtained from norm-referenced testing are used to understand the relationship between cognitive and language constructs. Standard scores of achievement are interpreted with the understanding of the limitations of norm-referenced achievement measures (i.e., curriculum alignment, item density, score interpretation; Schultz & Stephens, 2018)

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Remember,  
“assess” does not mean only  
“formally test.”  
“Assess” means **gathering and integrating data from multiple sources.**

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Assessment is the process of gathering multiple sources of data (P. 17; Stephens and Schultz, 2024).

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**“Testing is a component of an assessment”** – Standard statement made in trainings since C-SEP’s inception-we talk in both practical terms and the legal definition.

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A **pattern** is a set of characteristics displayed repeatedly; and The MDT will look for characteristics of disability displayed repeatedly, across data sets, and over time (p. 39).

- Defined in book, standard statement made in very training since 2015 (see Schultz et al., 2012).
- Schultz, Simpson, and Lynch (2012) describe the PSW approach as characterized by (a) multiple sources of data collected over time using “a variety of assessment tools and strategies” (as cited in Schultz & Stephens, 2018)
- In order to properly apply C-SEP, a PSW is characterized by the following features: (a) multiple sources of data collected over a period of time (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).

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Evidence-based evaluation practices will always allow for professional judgment based on the individual circumstances of the student (p. 40) .

- Schultz, E.K., & Stephens, T.L. (2009). Utilizing professional judgment within the SLD eligibility determination process: Guidelines for educational diagnosticians and ARD committee members. *The Dialog*, 38, 3-6.
- The C-SEP method uses individualized norm-referenced tests in an integrated manner along with a “variety of assessment tools and strategies” and professional judgment (Schultz & Stephens, 2015).
- Instead, C-SEP recognizes the role of the educational diagnostician’s professional judgment to determine if any additional tests, beyond the core tests, will provide information that may be relevant to the determination of SLD. Unless professional judgment or a clinical hypothesis suggests a reason, it may be unnecessary to always obtain cluster scores for seven cognitive factors of intelligence.

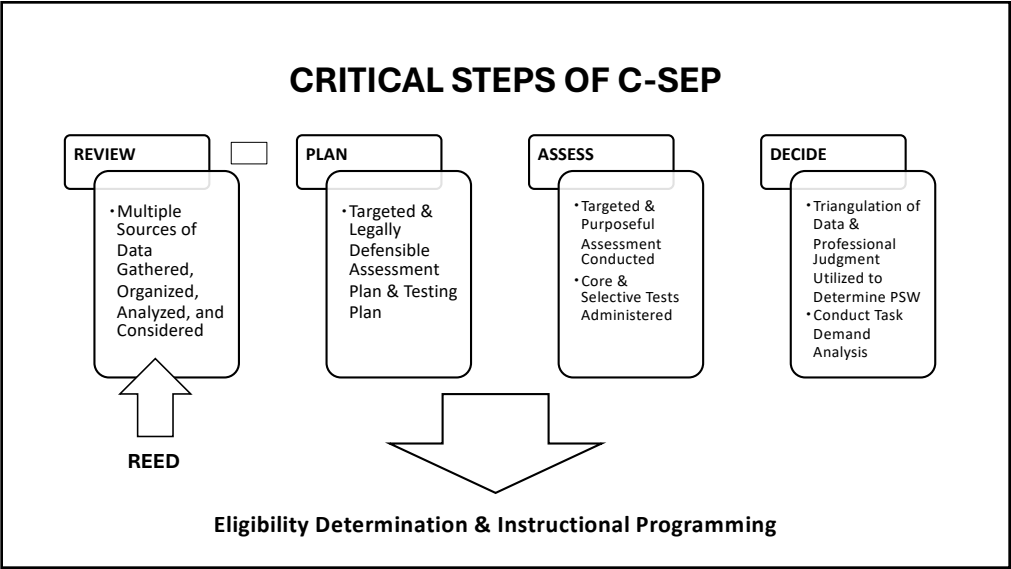
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The first step in any FIIE evaluation is the review of existing evaluation data (REED). A REED is the process of looking at a student’s existing data to determine what, if any, additional data are needed (p. 10).

|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------|--|--|--|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Student Name:<br>LDP, AT Risk, Other:                                                       |  | DOB/Age:<br>Campus:                         |         | Initial/ Re-eval<br>PEMS Ethnicity:                                                        |            | Area(s) of Eligibility:<br>Grade Level:                                                                 |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Retention<br>Never been retained<br>OR<br>Years retained: _____<br>Grade(s) repeated: _____ |  | Total Days<br>Absent<br>Total Days<br>Tardy |         | Health Information                                                                         |            | Language<br>Home: _____<br>Dominant: _____<br>Instruction: _____<br>OUPF Eng.: _____<br>OUPF Sp.: _____ |       | Parent Information<br>Strengths:<br>Concerns:<br>Family History: Y N                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  | Reading                                     |         |                                                                                            |            | Math                                                                                                    |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  | Grade                                       | DNM/L I | App                                                                                        | Meets/L II | Masters/L III                                                                                           | Grade | DNM/L I                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | App | Meets/L II | Masters/L III |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| STAAR Results                                                                               |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Observation/Interview                                                                       |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Notes                                                                                       |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Report Card Grades:                                                                         |  |                                             |         | Report Card Grades:                                                                        |            |                                                                                                         |       | Other Assessment Results                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Math: _____<br>Reading: _____<br>Writing: _____<br>Science: _____<br>Social Studies: _____  |  |                                             |         | Math: _____<br>Reading: _____<br>Writing: _____<br>Science: _____<br>Social Studies: _____ |            |                                                                                                         |       | Curriculum Assessments:<br>Math: _____<br>Reading: _____<br>Writing: _____<br>Science: _____<br>Social Studies: _____<br>DBA: _____<br>ESDP: _____<br>TELPAS: Lit: _____ Sp: _____ Rdg: _____ Wr: _____ Com: _____                                                                                                      |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Teacher Information                                                                         |  |                                             |         | Teacher Concerns                                                                           |            |                                                                                                         |       | 1) Basic Reading/Decoding (1, 2, 3, 4)<br>2) Oral Reading/Fluency (1, 2, 3, 4)<br>3) Reading Comprehension (1, 2, 3, 4)<br>4) Math Calculation (1, 2, 3, 4)<br>5) Math Problem Solving (1, 2, 3, 4)<br>6) Listening Comprehension (1, 2, 3, 4)<br>7) Oral Expression (1, 2, 3, 4)<br>8) Written Expression (1, 2, 3, 4) |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| RTI                                                                                         |  |                                             |         | Intervention(s) Implemented/Subject:                                                       |            |                                                                                                         |       | Intervention(s) Implemented/Subject:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Frequency:                                                                                  |  |                                             |         | Frequency:                                                                                 |            |                                                                                                         |       | Frequency:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Duration:                                                                                   |  |                                             |         | Duration:                                                                                  |            |                                                                                                         |       | Duration:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Results:                                                                                    |  |                                             |         | Results:                                                                                   |            |                                                                                                         |       | Results:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |     |            |               |                                         |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
| Review of Educational Records                                                               |  |                                             |         | Outcome of RTI                                                                             |            |                                                                                                         |       | Strengths/Weaknesses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |     |            |               | Exclusionary Factors                    |  |  |  | Failure to Meet Grade Level |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         | Adequate ROI (instructional causality?)                                                    |            |                                                                                                         |       | Reading S W                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |     |            |               | Visual, hearing, or motor Y N           |  |  |  | Standards                   |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         | Slow but Rising ROI (general low ach.)                                                     |            |                                                                                                         |       | Math S W                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |     |            |               | Limited English proficiency Y N         |  |  |  | Y N Area(s): _____          |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         | Minimal ROI (SLDT)                                                                         |            |                                                                                                         |       | Writing S W                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |     |            |               | Intellectual disability Y N             |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       | Behavior S W                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |     |            |               | Emotional disturbance Y N               |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       | Oral Language S W                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |     |            |               | Cultural diff. or eco. Disadvantage Y N |  |  |  | Hypothesis:                 |  |  |  |
|                                                                                             |  |                                             |         |                                                                                            |            |                                                                                                         |       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |     |            |               | Inadequate instruction Y N              |  |  |  |                             |  |  |  |

Sarah B Holman 9-2019

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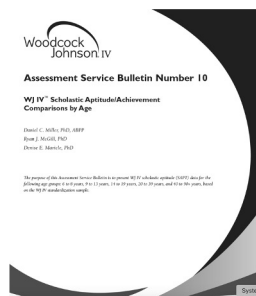
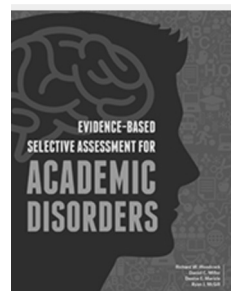
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- Expands on C-SEP and what we have trained for years (2015-2025)
- C-SEP is a tightly woven collection of best practices for organizing assessments that identify, explain, and understand learning disabilities, leading to better interventions and outcomes for students with specific learning disabilities.
- C-SEP 2.0 represents some significant shifts:
  - Enhanced emphasis on “Using learning data (poor instructional response) to identify and using tests to understand.”
  - Core-Selective Testing (Publishers guide test selection )
  - Selective-Core (The evaluator selects targeted “core” tests)
  - Manifestations are the most important aspects to measure and understand

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## Selective Core “Thinking” Influence



*The Integration of the WJ V  
within a School Neuropsychology Model*  
Tammy Stephens, PhD

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## Oral Language and Intellectual Development

- C-SEP 2.0 (Selective-Core) goes beyond cognitive explanations to understand learning by using:
  - Areas of intellectual development are most related to the academic construct (e.g., Comprehension Requires Gc/Gf/Gwm)
  - Influence of Oral Language (e.g., oral language predicts written language).
  - Achievement areas as predictors (e.g., BR and RF predict RC)
- Schultz, E.K., Stephens, T.L., & Olvera, P. (2024). Intellectual Development and the Core-Selective Evaluation Process: Gaining Insight and Understanding of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities. *Contemporary School Psychology*. Spring. doi.org/10.1007/s40688-024-00499-3
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## C-SEP 1.0 Remains Unchanged

- Policy, publisher, practices, and professional judgment.
- Oral language is assessed, not just for “listen, think, speak” and LC and OE, but because it is critical for learning (CALP)
- Efficient and responsible use of tests
- We have long since recognized the issues with formula testing methods/models

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## We Recognized the Limitations of Formula Methods when developing C-SEP

- However, several limitations also exist, these include a) over-reliance on norm-referenced tests, standard scores, and statistical formulas, b) overvaluing the effects of cognitive deficits on academic performance, c) dichotomizing continuous variables, and d) limited weight given to other data sources (Schultz & Stephens, 2018).
- When norm-referenced scores are used as the primary basis of identification in discrepancy models and used to make high stakes decisions then the evaluation is subject to the limitations described earlier (Schultz & Stephens, 2017).

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# Limitations of NRT in Policy/Policy Guidance

- Sept 21 [You Tube video](#) (removal of significant variance; preponderance)
- 2023 SLD Guidance Document (formulas, reliability, etc.)
- 2024 Dx Handbook (NRT not always necessary)
- 2025 SLD Guidance
- Let’s look at these limitations (test-retest reliabilities, test selection). These are discussed on pages 31-32.

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## A Systematic Review of the PSW Diagnostic Accuracy Evidence for SLD Identification: Is It Time to Abandon PSW?

Stefan C. Dombrowski<sup>a</sup>, Nicholas F. Benson<sup>b</sup>, and Kathrin E. Maki<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Rider University; <sup>b</sup>Baylor University; <sup>c</sup>University of Florida

**ABSTRACT**  
Procedures for identifying specific learning disabilities (SLD) have been controversial, if not contentious, for many decades. Over this period, researchers and policymakers have sought to replace the IQ-achievement discrepancy (IAD) method, the original method used to identify SLD, with alternative research-based approaches. Patterns of strengths and weaknesses (PSW) is advocated as overcoming the limitations of the IAD method, is allowed under federal special education regulations, and has been adopted by at least 14 states. Questions remain, however, regarding whether PSW is evidence-based as an identification procedure. This study sought to understand the evidentiary basis of PSW for SLD identification through a systematic review of the diagnostic accuracy evidence. Review results showed that PSW identifies SLD at the level of chance (e.g., a coin flip) regardless of PSW method used, instrument employed, and whether real or simulated data are used. The evidence to date suggests that PSW may not be worth the time or effort for SLD identification, and therefore, psychologists are encouraged to consider alternative SLD identification methods.

**IMPACT STATEMENT**  
This study reviews the diagnostic accuracy research surrounding patterns of strengths and weaknesses (PSW) for specific learning disabilities (SLD) identification. The results indicated that no matter what PSW method is used, the procedure is only about as accurate as a coin flip when used to identify SLD. School districts and school psychology practitioners should look to alternative procedures to PSW when seeking a method for SLD identification.

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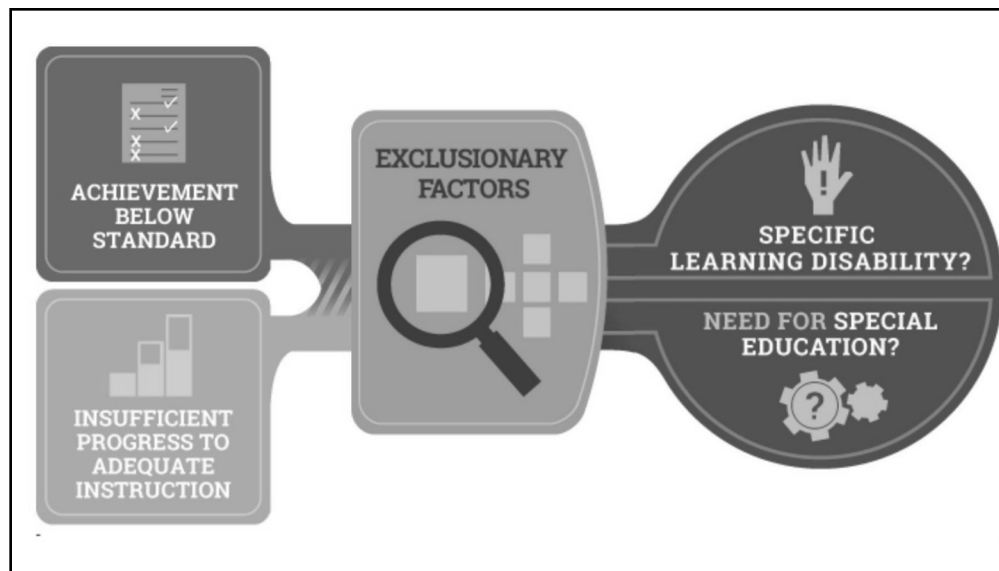
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5. A diagnostic accuracy analysis of the CSEP has never been undertaken so it is unknown whether it would produce similar findings. One of its authors has indicated via personal correspondence (E. Schultz, 4/25/23) that the CSEP has now moved toward a low achievement approach to SLD identification.

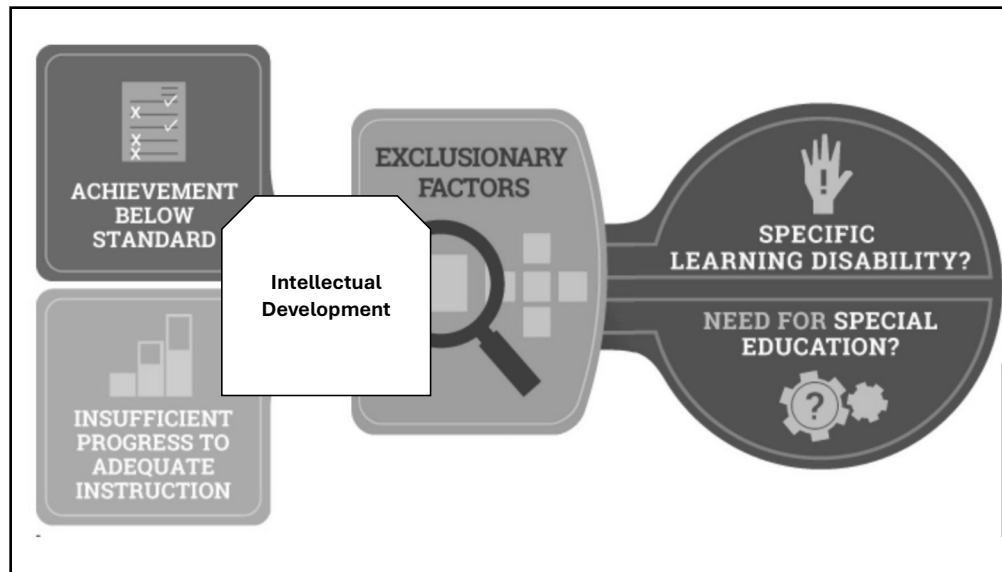
We have always been a “low achievement model” as we have always advocated for the responsible and efficient use of test to “explain and understand underachieving”, b) we understand the diagnostic concerns with models that use “significant variance and “cut-off” scores, so we have never used them, therefore CSEP has always been a preponderance of evidence model requiring solid professional judgment.

**Note: A score profile is not a pattern**

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## Tests are used to Understand and Explain Underachievement

- Interaction and relationships are the key
- C-SEP –Intellectual development (most/many referral concerns; multiple areas)
- Selective-Core: intellectual development, targeted
- Guidance Document (p.22)
  - Case-by-case basis
  - Not required
  - Valuable insights
  - Inform instruction
  - Limited assessments instead of full assessments

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## Psy Process/language = Manifestations Manifestations = Psy process/language

- The relationship between cognitive abilities and academic achievement is bidirectional, meaning they mutually influence each other during development, with each impacting the other's growth (Tikhomirova et al., 2020; Peng & Kievet, 2020)
- Our findings suggest that (a) reading/mathematics and cognitive abilities (i.e., working memory, reasoning, and executive function) predict each other in development, (b) direct academic instruction positively affects the development of reasoning, and (c) such bidirectional relations between cognitive abilities and academic achievement seem weaker among children with disadvantages (e.g., those with special needs or low socioeconomic status). (Peng & Kievet, 2020)
- It is important to understand that these "processes" are interdependent and overlapping (Peterson et al., 2017; Potocki, et al., 2017). (Schultz, et al. 2021)
- Page 218 of WJ V Tech Manual
- See "Intellectual Development" article (2024)

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## Achievement Tests: Manifestations of Underlying Cognition and Language (Intellectual Development)



Not using achievement tests to measure achievement; actual achievement data is used for that section)



*Reading, math, and writing are also complex cognitive skills that represent the manifestations of other cognitive skills but separating academic and core cognitive skills is useful for assessment and intervention purposes. (Fletcher, p. 4)*



*The strengths and weaknesses in cognitive skills that some view as essential to the nature of LDs (e.g., phonological awareness, working memory) can be accounted for simply by assessing the achievement domains (e.g., word recognition) (Fletcher, p. 6)*



**SLD definition**



**Psychological process + language = Achievement**

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## From Guidance Document...

- “The MDT must not rely on interpretative models or processes that exclude evidence of a disability based on predetermined score profiles or cutoff scores. Requiring a student to have a cognitive weakness that correlates with an academic weakness may result in a student not receiving special education and related services that they are entitled to receive. (p. 41)
- We do not have to do a 23 and me, go down rabbit holes, “prove” the cognitive process. We recommend describing test performance in terms of task demands “Eleonor struggles on tasks that require orthography and phonology.”

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## Selective-Core Test Selection



What is the referral question, what data do you have?



Understand the construct (Reading Rope, typical math development, intellectual development)



Break down the achievement area to select the most important predictors and underlying cognitive and linguistic processes.



Refer to the test manual (defensible)



SLD Guidance Document is a good source and make sure to follow Dx handbook as well.



Select test that will give you the most information. Remember you can always test more if warranted.

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## General Considerations: Test Selection

- Applied Skills –MPS, WE, RC
- Gc, Gf, GWM, GL (BIA)
- Basic/fluency Skills –Lower-Level Abilities
- Ga, Gr, Gv, Gs

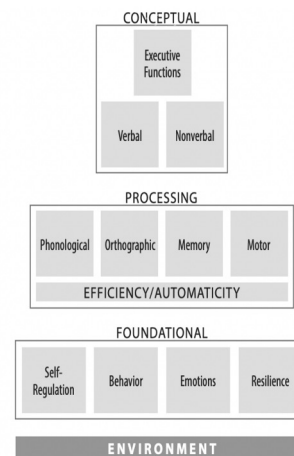


Figure 1.2. The Building Blocks of Learning model.

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| Table 1.5 Demands Analysis of Subtests |                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reading                                | Input                                                                                                        | Process                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Output                                                                                                                   |
| Letter & Word Recognition              | ■ Brief spoken directions<br>■ Letters and words on a page<br>■ Spoken stimuli                               | ■ Acquired knowledge and achievement: letter and word recognition and decoding                                                                                                                                                  | ■ Spoken response<br>■ Pointing response<br>■ Open ended<br>■ Multiple choice                                            |
| Nonsense Word Decoding                 | ■ Brief spoken directions<br>■ Teaching items<br>■ Nonwords on a page                                        | ■ Acquired knowledge and achievement: decoding<br>■ Higher-level processing: phonetic analysis<br>■ Verbal working memory                                                                                                       | ■ Spoken response<br>■ Oral formulation<br>■ Open ended                                                                  |
| Reading Comprehension                  | ■ Brief spoken directions<br>■ Teaching item<br>■ Symbols and pictures<br>■ Words and passages on a page     | ■ Acquired knowledge and achievement: word recognition and decoding, language comprehension, reading fluency<br>■ Simultaneous processing<br>■ Verbal working memory<br>■ Executive functions: inhibition of multiple responses | ■ Spoken response<br>■ Pointing response<br>■ Gross motor (i.e., do what this says)<br>■ Open ended<br>■ Multiple choice |
| Reading Vocabulary                     | ■ Spoken directions<br>■ Teaching items<br>■ Words and sentences on a page<br>■ Early items include pictures | ■ Acquired knowledge and achievement: word recognition and decoding, vocabulary knowledge, language comprehension<br>■ Associative ability<br>■ Verbal working memory                                                           | ■ Spoken or pointing response<br>■ Constrained                                                                           |

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Selective Core –Reading Comprehension



| Reading Comprehension |                         |                 |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Cognition             | Language                | Skills          |
| Gc                    | Listening Comprehension | Reading fluency |
| Gf                    |                         | Basic reading   |
| GWM                   |                         |                 |
| (BIA; BIQ)            |                         |                 |

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Figure 4.4 WIAT-4 and Domains of Math Achievement

| Math domain                                                                                                                          | WIAT-4 subtest                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Math facts</b><br><i>Working memory, conceptual knowledge, processing speed, and naming speed</i>                                 | Math Fluency–Addition<br>Math Fluency–Subtraction<br>Math Fluency–Multiplication |
| ↓                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                  |
| <b>Computation</b><br><i>Working memory and conceptual and procedural knowledge</i>                                                  | Numerical Operations                                                             |
| ↓                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                  |
| <b>Problem-Solving</b><br><i>Working memory, conceptual knowledge, language comprehension, and verbal and quantitative reasoning</i> | Math Problem Solving                                                             |

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Selective-Core: Math Problem Solving



| Math Problem Solving               |                            |             |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| Cognition                          | Language                   | Skills      |
| Comprehension Knowledge (GC)       |                            | Calculation |
| Fluid Reasoning (Quant. Reasoning) | Reading Comprehension (GI) |             |
| Working memory (GWM)               |                            |             |
| Visual Processing                  |                            |             |

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# Basis Reading (Dyslexia)



**Table 1.1 Subtest Descriptions**

| Subtest                   | Description                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phonological Processing   | The examinee responds orally to items that require manipulation of the sounds within words.                          |
| Letter & Word Recognition | The examinee identifies letters and pronounces words.                                                                |
| Nonsense Word Decoding    | The examinee reads nonsense words.                                                                                   |
| Spelling                  | Early items require writing single letters that represent sounds. Later items involve spelling words from dictation. |
| Letter Naming Facility    | The examinee names a combination of upper and lowercase letters as quickly as possible.                              |
| Word Recognition Fluency  | The examinee reads a list of words aloud as quickly as possible during two 15-second trials.                         |

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## Case Study

- Illustrate Selective Core
- Thorough understanding
- Impact on learning and recommendations
- Contemporary Report writing



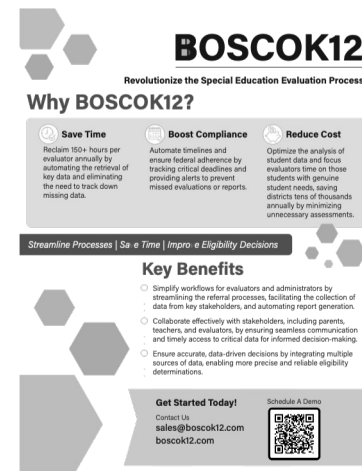
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## Questions and Comments

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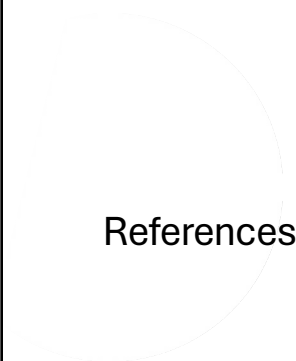


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