

# "Instructional Support Weekly"

Topic: How do school psychologists determine that a student has a learning disability?

To the best of my knowledge most of the districts in this area are still using the "discrepancy" model. That means that if there is a significant discrepancy between a student's intellectual ability and their academic achievement, it can be determined that he/she has a Specific Learning Disability. This testing is done by a school psychologist.

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 (federal law) no longer approves this model. States are not allowed to require this as their method of determining learning disability eligibility. IDEA encourages school districts to use "research-based procedures" and a "process of determining eligibility based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention (RTI)." Districts haven't quite determined how to do this most efficiently and effectively, but are working towards it in conjunction with the discrepancy model.

What does all this mean to us at St. Thomas More?  
It is imperative that we are...

- Continuing to develop and implement research-based practices in our classrooms.
- Using the IST process and our Instructional Support Program to determine appropriate research-based interventions.
- Implementing interventions and seeking assistance and clarification from instructional support teachers when necessary.
- Documenting the effectiveness of research-based practices and interventions and sharing with all who work with that student.

Our goal is to figure out which interventions to apply so that the child is successful. As we become better at accommodating students' individual learning styles, we should see a decline in the number of evaluation referrals from STM. This is the same goal of the federal government with their reauthorization of IDEA in 2004.

If a student is demonstrating average or above average academic performance in your class, he/she is not exhibiting a "problem" that is interfering with his/her academic progress. If we ask a school district to evaluate this student because we think he/she might have a learning disability, they will refuse and have done so.

Have a great week!  
From the Instructional Support Team at STM!

REFERENCES:

Siegel, Lawrence M. Esq. (2007) Nolo's IEP Guide Learning Disabilities 3rd Edition. Delta Printing Solutions.