

Harvard Public Schools
Special Education Department

Description of Assessments Used for Special Education Evaluation

This information sheet is provided to help you understand the enclosed Evaluation Consent Form. This form is required by federal and state regulations.

Types of Assessments:

A variety of assessment tools and strategies will be used. The specific tests recommended for your child will be individually designed to gather the diagnostic information necessary to understand and address whatever learning concerns are present. These may include:

Standardized Tests:

These tests are developed using extensive research, data, and statistical analysis. They must be administered by professionals who are trained in the accurate administration and interpretation of the particular test. The results of these assessments provide statistically precise information about the relative progress of your child in relation to average expectations for your child's chronological age and grade. These tests also provide very reliable baselines for assessing progress over time.

Frequently used tests of this type include:

Cognitive Abilities Tests such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children. – Fourth Edition, The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scales – Third Edition and the Woodcock Johnson-III Tests of Cognitive Abilities.

Broad Educational Achievement Tests such as the Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement or the Wechsler Individual Achievement Tests

Skill Specific Educational Achievement tests such as the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processes, Gray Oral Reading Test, Test of Written Language, or the Key Math. Many of the assessments used by a speech/language pathologist, occupational therapist, and other specialists are also standardized assessments. There are many valuable tests of this type and those most appropriate for your child's age and needs will be chosen by the evaluator.

Curriculum Based Measures :

These assessments evaluate your child's skill in performing tasks consistent with grade level curriculum standards. These include instruments such as DIBELS progress monitoring, analysis of a child's reading of leveled books/text, rubrics for assessing writing, and math unit assessments. Information from Report cards and district wide testing such as MCAS may also be considered. These types of assessments provide helpful information about a student's response to instruction and progress in the grade level program. However, it is important to consider carefully the conditions of testing and instruction in interpreting information from this type of assessment.

Developmental and Criterion-Referenced Checklists:

These assessments compare your child's skills in a particular area against known developmental stages and expectations. They are generally checklists completed by adults who are familiar with the child and report on the child's ability to consistently demonstrate specific skills. This type of assessment includes Early Childhood assessment tools such as the Brigance Inventory, as well as teacher and parent checklists in areas such as attention skills, social skills, adaptive behavior skills, and organizational or executive functioning skills.

Personality or Emotional Status Measures:

These kinds of assessments can include screening instruments such as checklists, drawings, sentence completions and interviews. Screening instruments are used to rule out emotional or personality factors or to indicate a need for further assessment in these areas. Where emotional or personality factors are considered key factors of the evaluation, more in depth measures such as the Thematic Apperception Test or the Tasks of Emotional Development Test maybe used.

OTHER TERMS THAT MAY NEED CLARIFICATION:

Psycho-educational Evaluation:

A psycho-educational evaluation refers to an evaluation that includes comprehensive cognitive and educational achievement testing. Any team evaluation that includes both types of assessments is a Psycho-educational Evaluation. In some cases, the same evaluator may administer both cognitive and educational achievement tests and present the results in a single, psycho-educational report.

Assessment in All Areas Related to the Suspected Disability(ies):

Regulations require that the evaluation include assessments in all area of suspected disability, based on the referral concerns and questions.

This list may include specific areas such as reading, writing, math, speech and language, motor skills, attention skills, or social skills, depending on the areas in which your child is having difficulty. Assessment in each area recommended will be completed by a professional who is trained and qualified to complete that type of assessment.

Educational Assessment:

This assessment is a review of the student's educational history, and current school performance in relation to grade level curriculum standards. Information for this is gathered from parents, teachers, and school records. An Educational Assessment is required for all initial evaluations.

Observation of the Student:

One or more members of the evaluation team will observe the student in his/her classroom, early intervention program, or other natural setting related to the evaluation concerns.

Health Assessment:

This assessment may include a review of health records and history completed by the school nurse and/or medical information provided to the team by a physician.

Psychological Assessment:

This assessment is a comprehensive assessment of a student's cognitive, intellectual, adaptive, and/or social-emotional abilities, completed by a School Psychologist. In a team evaluation, the Psychological Assessment will often provide the cognitive skills evaluation using tests such as the Wechsler Intelligence Test for Children –IV or the Woodcock-Johnson III – Test of Cognitive Abilities. A School Psychological evaluation may also include neuropsychological assessments.

Home Assessment:

A home visit may be recommended to gain more information about the child's needs, abilities, and challenges at home. This is generally recommended when assessing very young children, but may also be appropriate and recommended for students at any age.