

## **Procedures for the determination of Specific Learning Disabilities**

In 2004, significant changes were made in the federal special education law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). An important aspect of this change was the in evaluation methods that schools could use to determine eligibility for specific learning disabilities. Over time, there have been new frameworks in which to determine if a student has a learning disability. Based on contemporary thinking and the most up-to-date research, Flat Rock Community Schools has adopted the Patterns of Strengths of Weaknesses (PSW) Model, along with a Response to Intervention Framework, to identify learning disabilities in students. Specifically, we have adopted the Wayne County RESA Guidance /Model for the determination of learning disabilities, which is based on CHC Theory of Cognitive Abilities.

The Wayne County model for the identification of Specific Learning Disabilities emphasizes the full and individual evaluation of a student. This is a process of data collection that includes multiple methods of assessing student performance with input from parents, teachers, instructional specialists, and school psychologists. This includes curriculum based assessment, progress towards benchmarks, and standardized academic and cognitive assessment. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide the best and most comprehensive information possible about the student of concern to make valid and appropriate recommendations as to the student's eligibility for special education and, more importantly, educationally relevant recommendations for instructional strategies, supports and services.

### **RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RTI)**

We believe in the importance of early intervention so that our students who are at risk of learning failure can have access to strategies and interventions early in their school career so they can be successful learners. As a result, we universally screen our students to determine which students may need additional academic or behavioral support and then continuously monitor their progress with repeated measures within our RTI framework.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a school-wide, instructional framework that promotes an integrated method of providing academic instruction and interventions to students through a multi-tiered, data driven process. With the RTI framework, students are provided with explicit evidence-based instruction and interventions. We have 4 tiers of intervention services, with increasingly more intensive and more individually tailored intervention services for students who need additional assistance to meet grade level standards. Student progress is carefully measured and periodically monitored over an extended period of time (8-12 weeks) and the instructional interventions are adjusted to teach the skills necessary for the student to make sufficient progress toward age or grade level standards. Based on the student's response to the interventions and other considerations, the school team then determines whether or not the student may demonstrate indications of a specific learning disability. If it is determined that a student failed to make sufficient progress, despite interventions, then a full and individual evaluation by a multidisciplinary evaluation team is recommended using the PSW model.

### **PATTERNS OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES MODEL**

The Patterns of Strength and Weakness model (also referred to as the Ability- Achievement Consistency Model) requires an extensive analysis of the student's patterns of strengths and weaknesses in their academic skills (achievement) and cognitive abilities when compared to age and State approved grade

level standards, using tailored assessments. This includes the use of individual and standardized academic and cognitive assessment. The assessment will explore consistencies between a student's cognitive and academic strengths and weaknesses to determine if they are empirically related. This will help uncover the underlying reasons for a student's learning difficulties. The information will not only be used to determine eligibility, but to drive instructional interventions for the student. A student can have a learning disability in 8 areas: basic reading skill, reading fluency, reading comprehension, math calculation, math problem solving, written expression, oral expression or listening comprehension.

*What is Learning Disability?* A learning disability is "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written. The disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations".

Before making a final determination of a specific learning disability, we must ensure that the student's achievement difficulties are not due to factors such as lack of instruction, visual or hearing disabilities, mental impairment, emotional disturbance or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage, English as a second language or other conditions that could account for the student's lack of response to intervention.

Not all learning difficulties are due to a learning disability. If there is evidence that the learning problems are explained by other conditions, the team must ask: *Would the student's academic performance improve with appropriate interventions for these conditions?*

This Wayne County RESA Model for the determination of Learning Disabilities (Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses model) can be found at the following website:

<http://www.resa.net/services/spedcompliance/learningdisabilities/>

#### *When Parents Suspect a Specific Learning Disability*

If a parent suspects that their child may have a learning disability, they should contact their child's teacher to discuss their concerns. A meeting can be held to discuss the various options to help the student become more successful in school.

The website below will provide parents with a brief overview of the process of learning disability determination process.

[http://www.resa.net/downloads/special\\_education/trifold\\_brochure\\_for\\_parents\\_20100415\\_081414\\_4.pdf](http://www.resa.net/downloads/special_education/trifold_brochure_for_parents_20100415_081414_4.pdf)