Special Education Academy

Part 4 of 10: Evaluations and Assessment Reports: How to Understand Them and Prepare for the IEP Meeting

December 8, 2025

Today's Agenda

- Introductions and Expectations
  - Common Assessments in Psychoeducational, Speech, OT, and PT Evaluations
- Reviewing Assessment Report Scores and Preparing for the IEP Meeting
- Q&A

Information is POWER

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund

- Unique alliance of people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities.
- National law and policy center dedicated to protecting and advancing disability civil and human rights.
- Disability rights are civil rights

- **VISION:** a just world where all people live full and independent lives free of discrimination.

- Educate legislators and policy makers on issues (such as IDEA, ADA) affecting rights of people with disabilities.

Parent Training and Information Centers

DREDF is a federally-funded Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), funded through the U.S. Department of Education.

PTIs are in every state and territory. If you are outside DREDF's service area, please contact us and we will direct you to yours, or go to:
https://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/

What we do at a Parent Training and Information Center:

- **Work with families** of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, birth-26
- **Help** parents participate effectively in their children's education and development
- **Partner** with professionals and policy makers to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities

Children with disabilities who have consistent, knowledgeable advocates are most likely to receive appropriate services & supports.

Expectations:

What we WILL talk about today:
- School district obligations to evaluate for suspected disability
- How to request an evaluation
- Eligibility categories under the IDEA
- The assessment plan
- Advocacy strategies

What we will NOT talk about today:
- Specific students and schools
- Please contact **iephelp@dredf.org** with specific questions.

What we cannot do:
- Provide a magic solution or quick fix - the process takes time!
- Provide legal or therapeutic advice: We are <u>lay advocates</u>.
- We are <u>not</u> attorneys, licensed therapists, or social workers.

How We'll Proceed:

Please help us keep to the topic and agenda.

- We will take **general questions at the end**. Be kind, courteous and respectful when asking questions.
- Assume positive intentions
- We all have something to learn from each other and what we share is valuable
- This is a collaborative, judgement-free zone.
- We will do our best to use plain language and explain unfamiliar terminology. Use the chat to ask about a new word or phrase.
- All acronyms will be explained (remind us if we forget, please!)

Why we use "Disability," and not "Special Needs"

- "Special needs:" not a term coined by disabled people or the Disability Community.
- Everyone's needs are valid; there is nothing "special" about having equal access.
- "Special needs" erases the expertise of disabled adults who find the phrase infantilizing and inappropriate.
- It is not a term defined in law. "**Disability**" has a **specific legal definition and meaning**.
- It does not cover all disabled people, because not all disabled students are in special education classrooms or receive special education services.
- Parents may worry about labeling or stigmatizing their child, but "disability" brings rights, services, and access.

NEEDS	GOALS	SERVICES
DATA-DRIVEN • **Assessments** • **Grades** • **Test Scores** • **Behavior Reports** • **Observations** • **Independent Service Providers**	**ALL AREAS OF NEED** • **Academic** • **Social-emotional** • **Behavior** • **Daily Living Skills** **SMART GOALS:** • **Specific** • **Measurable** • **Achievable (yet Ambitious)** • **Relevant** • **Time-Bound**	**INDIVIDUALIZED** • **Accommodations** • **Adult Support** • **Related Services and Therapies** • **Specialized Academic Instruction** • **Counseling** • **Consultation with Outside Service Providers**

…THEN **we talk about placement!**

Frequently Tested Abilities and Skills
in
Psychoeducational Assessments

7 Areas of Cognitive / Thinking Skills

Crystallized Knowledge (Verbal Reasoning): Depth and breadth of knowledge; general knowledge; verbal reasoning

Fluid Reasoning (Nonverbal Problem Solving): Ability to solve novel problems using logic and reasoning

Visual-Spatial Processing: Ability to perceive, remember, and think with visual and spatial patterns of information

Short-Term Memory: Ability to hold information for short time and manipulate it

Long-Term Retrieval: Ability to learn information, store and retrieve it from long-term memory

Auditory/Phonological Processing: Ability to identify, isolate, blend, substitute, and analyze speech sounds

Processing Speed: Ability to perform simple and repetitive cognitive tasks quickly and efficiently

These skills are measured by standardized tests administered in a one-on-one setting with a school psychologist.

Additional Skills to Assess:

- **Sensorimotor Skills:** Ability to use ones eyes and hands in a coordinated and efficient way - visual and motor integration
- **Attention & Executive Functioning:** Ability to direct attention, keep it sustained over time, begin tasks, switch from one mental task to another with efficiency, remember instructions, and juggle mental tasks successfully
- **Orthographic Processing:** Ability to use the visual system to form, store, and recall words, as well as letter strings needed to recognize words
- **Social-Emotional Functioning and Well-Being**

Also Important: *Larry P*

The court case *Larry P. v. Riles* held that school districts in California only are not allowed to conduct any testing on African-American students that would give a FSIQ score.

Today, CDE follows its own legal directive banning IQ testing on African-American students.

There are many tests that assess a student's cognitive abilities and do not result in a FSIQ.

Larry P does not prevent schools from doing cognitive testing–only from tests that would conclude the student's FSIQ score.

Evaluations Should Also Include Assessments of:

Academic Achievement: Assessments that measure your child's mastery of core academic skills: reading, writing, math, and spelling.

- Standardized tests, work samples, and more
- Usually part of psychoeducational evaluation

Post-Secondary / Transition: 14 years (with parent consent) or 16 years and older: assessments related to a student's future needs for education, career planning and independent living skills

- Questionnaires, career interest surveys, review of academic and other abilities, and interviews with student are all part of the transition evaluation process

Common Test Batteries in Psychoeducational Reports:

- WISC (Cognition and intelligence; verbal and nonverbal tests)
- DAS (Cognition and intelligence; verbal and nonverbal tests)
- K-ABC (Cognition and intelligence; nonverbal testing)
- Test of Visual Perception Skills
- TAPS (Auditory processing)
- ADOS (autism)
- FAR (Tests for dyslexia subtype)
- Beery-Buktenica (Visual-motor integration)
- BASC (social-emotional well-being and development)
- Woodcock-Johnson (Academic mastery)
- Kaufman (K-ABC, academic tests)

Speech, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and AT Assessments

A Comprehensive Speech Assessment Includes:

- **Expressive** language
- **Receptive** language
- **Speech motor** skills such as:
  - Fluency
  - Articulation
- Interviews
- Observation/Speech samples

Pragmatic speech skills such as:

- Turn-taking
- Taking perspective of others
- Non-verbal communication skills

Test Batteries Common in Speech and Language:

- CELF-5 (also in Spanish; comprehensive speech and language tests, including pragmatics and metalinguistics)
- TOLD (language development)
- CASL
- ROWPVT (receptive language)
- EOWPVT (expressive language)
- CTOPP (phonological processing)
- TOWL (comprehension of written language)
- GORT (oral reading fluency)

Look up **Pearson Speech and Language Assessments**

Fine Motor/Sensory (OT) and Gross Motor (PT) Tests:

OT:

- Weschler, coding / mazes
- Stanford-Binet, copying
- Wide Range Assessment Visual Motor Abilities
- Beery-Buktenica (VMI)
- DeCoste Writing Protocol
- Sensory Processing Measure
- Observations
- Work samples
- Interviews

PT:

- Bruininks-Oseretsky Test of Motor Performance
- Peabody Development Motor Skills
- Timed Up and Go
- Test of Gross Motor Development
- Observations
- Interviews

Assistive Technology (AT) Assessments:

- Assessing Student Needs for Assistive Technology (ASNAT-5), DeCoste Writing Protocol, others.
- Identify student needs
- Identify potential technologies to assist students
- Device trials
- If the device works, procure the device for student
- Implement the device and train appropriate staff
- Track and monitor implementation and success/difficulties with the device
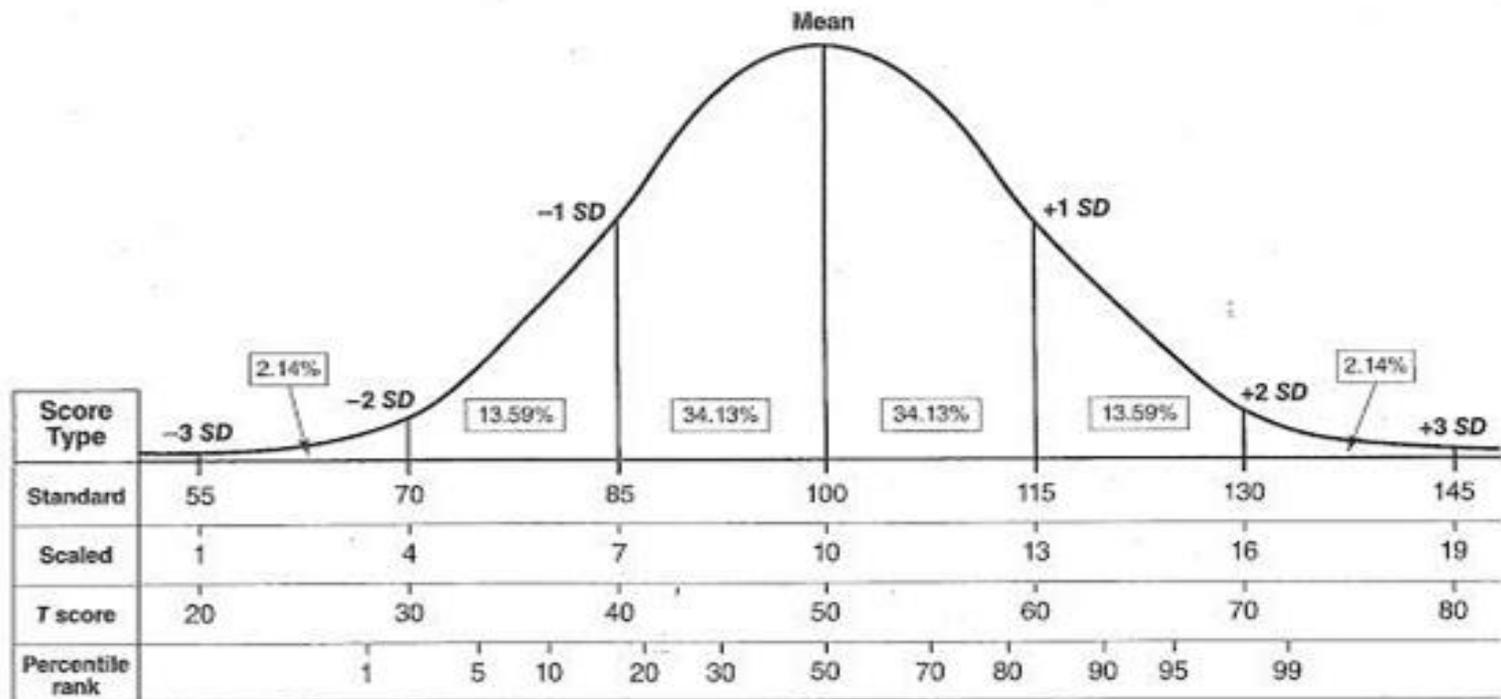
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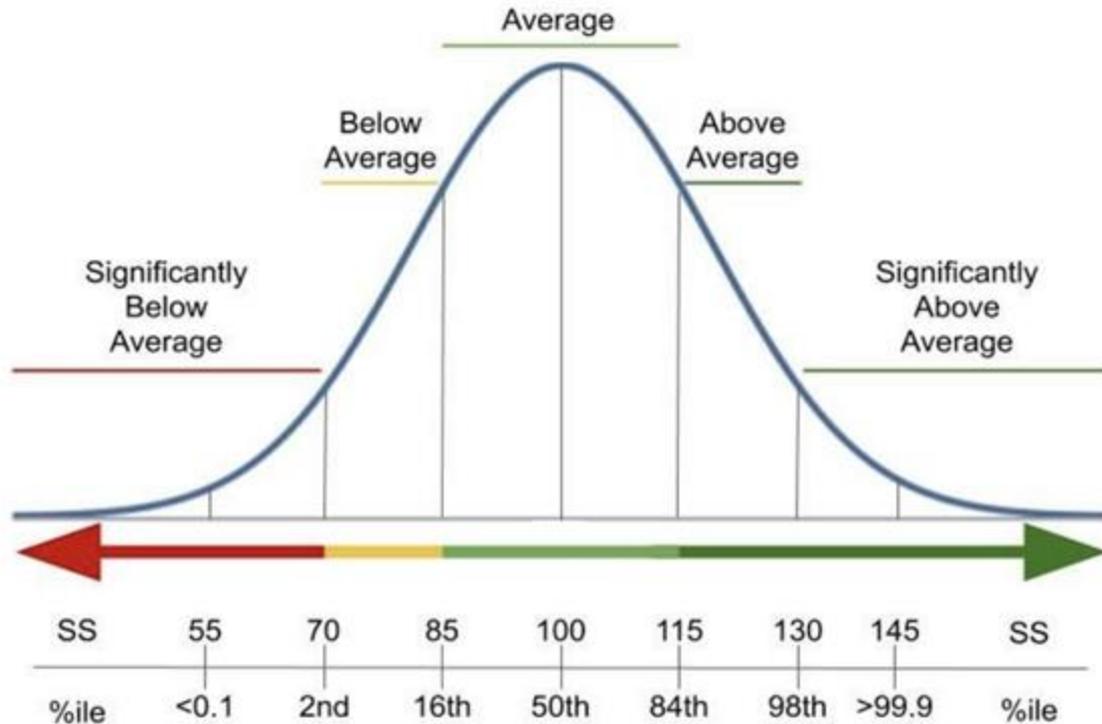
Standard Scores:
The mean is 100 and is "perfectly average" - everything +/- 15 points is also in the average range. Standard scores are widely used in special education evaluations.

Percentile Ranks: These scores tell you what percentage of the sample scored equal to or less than the student's score. If the student's percentile rank was 50, they scored as well as or better than 50% of the sample population.

Interpretation of Evaluation Results

Score Type							
	−3 SD	−2 SD	−1 SD	Mean	+1 SD	+2 SD	+3 SD
Standard	55	70	85	100	115	130	145
Scaled	1	4	7	10	13	16	19
T score	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
Percentile rank		1	5 10 20 30	50	70 80 90 95	99	

2.14%   13.59%   34.13%   34.13%   13.59%   2.14%

When Reviewing Reports with IEP Team:

- Look to see if there are Standardized Scores below 85, or percentiles below 16%. If so:
    - Ask if there should be an **IEP goal** in that area
    - Ask if there should be **specialized instruction or service**
    - Ask if there should be a **modification**
    - Ask if there should be an **accommodation**
- Look for **discrepancies** in subtests. Are there scores that are more than 15 points apart on a standardized scale? Is there one score that is "below average" or listed as a "weakness" in otherwise average or above average scores?

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Components of a Strong Assessment Report (any kind)

- All federal- and state-mandated timelines are met
- Includes student history
- Parent, family, and outside provider interviews and reports (and feedback!) included
- Observations in multiple settings (classroom, playground, lunch, transitions, etc)
- A variety of assessment tools used in each area
- Eligibility determination recommendations*
- Recommendations for goals, services, accommodations, and other classroom supports

What if a Student is Not Found Eligible?

- Continue with Coordinated Care Team (CCT) or Student Success Team (SST) process to assign (general education) supports and interventions, if warranted (**504 Plan)**
- Consult with the school assessor (assessment findings can inform next steps)
- Parents may consider requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)

Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)

"A parent has the right to an independent educational evaluation at public expense if the parent <u>disagrees</u> with an evaluation obtained by the public agency" [34 CFR 300.502]

If a parent can show **disagreement** with the school's evaluation, and show the assessment reports miss what we talked about a few slides ago, the parent can request an IEE at public expense in writing. The parent chooses the assessor (who is not employed by the school).

Generally, parents have **two years** to request an IEE, and should request **all areas** of assessments they disagree with at the same time.

School Districts Have Two Responses to An IEE Request:

Fund the IEE
The District will agree to provide the IEE in PWN with:
1) A list of reasonable criteria for assessors
2) A list of assessors for that type of evaluation that the district already has a contract with.

Timeline: The school district's response must be made "without unnecessary delay."

File for Due Process Hearing
The District will file for due process hearing to prove to an administrative law judge that:

1) The District's own evaluation is valid, thorough, and accurate
2) District assessed all areas of suspected disability, and the IEP team can build an IEP that provides FAPE.

Advocacy Strategies

Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs

UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE AND THE PROCESS:

- Get a copy of the contact list and organization chart for the district you are working with, and follow the chain of command. Review family/student handbook.

- Are there additional resources in the district you can access, such as ADR, collaborative conferences, or Facilitated IEP meetings?

- Assume best intentions of staff and ask questions (examples in two slides)

- **Learn** the policies and California Education Code

- Remember: The IDEA, ADA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and all other federal laws **supercede** state and local code–and school district policies.

- This is a marathon, not a sprint. Navigating special education takes patience, persistence, time, and lots of documentation.

Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs (Slide 1 of 2)

DOCUMENT: If you didn't put it in writing, it didn't happen.

- Create a "2025-2026 IEP Journal" to **document the good and bad** each week
- **Over-communicate** with all members of the team
- **Request all student records** in 5 business days (including incident reports)
- **Request IEP meeting in writing** as soon as IEP concerns arise

Strategies for Advocacy and Communication in IEPs (Slide 2 of 2)

- Email the school that parent/guardian will **audio record the IEP meeting with at least 24 hours' notice**. (Use voice memo on smartphones or Otter.ai app to record and transcribe.)
- Keep a **hard copy of all IEPs, assessments, forms, etc. in labeled folder** or binder (or rubber band/clip) in reverse chronological order and by school year: https://www.understood.org/en/articles/how-to-organize-your-childs-iep-binder
- If you have a computer, **label all documents the same way** (e.g. "2025.03.24 Annual IEP" and "2025.03.24 Triennial Speech Report") and organize folders by IEPs, Evaluations, Communications, etc.

How to Ask Questions so School Staff Can Answer:

- Can you please help me understand….
- Why are you proposing that service / accommodation / goal / etc?
- Have we considered (xxxx) as an area of need/service? Why or why not?
- How does (xxxx) help my child meet their goals?
- How does (xxxx) address the need we identified in our present levels discussion?
- Can you please show me a copy of that policy?
- How will that be implemented and by whom?
- What are we doing to address (xxxx) concern that I (or the teacher, therapist, etc) have raised?

Also:
- Please send that to me in writing after this meeting.
- Please send me timely Prior Written Notice in response to my request.

Questions?