



Communicating Special Education Evaluation Results and Recommendations

North Carolina School Psychology Association
Professional Practices Committee

In school settings, students are referred for evaluations to school psychologists or other evaluation specialists to help determine their academic and/or functional needs. Information from evaluations should be used by parents and school personnel to answer questions about student achievement and behavior and to plan meaningful educational intervention programs. Additionally, due to the high-stakes decisions that are tied to special education assessments, persons responsible for assessing students in educational settings must possess a variety of professional skills and competencies as determined by appropriate training and credentials. These skills and competencies are demonstrated throughout the special education evaluation process, which begins with a comprehensive review of existing data and observations and leads into the collection of individualized assessment data. The synthesis of multiple sources of data collected through the evaluation process should be documented within the context of the evaluation report and shared and interpreted by qualified professionals with parents and school personnel. Further, both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) and NC Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities state that the public (Local Education) agency (LEA) must ensure that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team for each child with a disability include *an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results (§ 300.321 (a)(5); NC 1503-4.2(a)(5).*

The purpose of the special education evaluation is to answer questions regarding “what’s needed” to support the academic and/or functional needs of the individual student. As a result, the information provided within the evaluation report should drive the intervention planning for the student in order that the problem-solving process can continue. The continuation of the problem-solving process for students who have been evaluated may occur within the context of the specially designed instruction provided through an IEP, or, within the context of adjustments to the current design and delivery of general education supports for the student.

Typically, students are referred to the school psychologist to answer specific questions regarding their skills and abilities as well as to determine why certain behaviors are or are not occurring. Because each student is unique, the administration of specific assessment methods and instruments is guided by the context of the student’s functioning and the reason(s) for the referral. Therefore, in order to report and to interpret the results of the evaluation accurately, it is critical that the context of the assessment is understood and addressed. When assessment information is interpreted by someone other than the person who conducted the evaluation, a substantial loss in interpretive meaning may occur, even when the individual interpreting the evaluation is another school psychologist. For this reason, the school psychologist who conducted the evaluation is the best individual to convey the information through integration of the results of the assessment into meaningful instructional recommendations for parents and school personnel. This occurs through both the written communication that occurs in the



development of the evaluation report and the oral communication skills that are evidenced by the professional within the context of the interpretive meeting.

The North Carolina School Psychology Association (NCSPA) recommends that school administrators and other school personnel consider the loss of professional expertise, child-specific data, and contextual information that occurs when the school psychologist who conducted the assessment is unable to attend planning, eligibility, or IEP meetings. Written reports typically do not adequately communicate all of the behavior, nonverbal, and anecdotal information that a practitioner observes during assessments and other data collection activities. A similar loss of important information would occur if a substitute teacher were to present the student's performance records in place of the regular classroom teacher. National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Ethical Principle II.3 (Responsible Assessment and Intervention Practices), Standard II.3.8, indicates that *school psychologists adequately interpret findings and present results in clear, understandable terms so that the recipient can make informed choices* (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010). It is, therefore, within one's professional standards of practice, to be present at the interpretive IEP meeting in order to convey the findings, interpretations, and recommendations that result from an individual evaluation. Adherence to this practice will help to ensure that assessment data are interpreted accurately and are clearly understood. The presence of school psychologists and other multi-disciplinary team members at IEP meetings allows for verbal interactions, additional information sharing, and collaboration that contributes to effective decision-making and educational program planning to best meet the needs of the individual student.

Taking into consideration the general time and scheduling constraints that school psychologists may face as a result of challenging staffing ratios and high caseloads, full participation of the school psychologist at conferences and meetings is not always feasible. In these circumstances, there are other options to consider. These options include:

- School psychologist participates in the meeting via phone, or, virtually (when scheduling conflicts do not allow her/him to be "in-person" on the date of the meeting)
- School psychologist provides a face-to-face meeting, phone conference or virtual option with the parent *prior* to the evaluation results meeting (when overall availability on the actual date of the meeting is not possible)
- School psychologist participates in part, but not all, of the meeting (i.e., participates in the delivery of results and provides input into the IEP, but may need to excuse themselves prior conclusion of the meeting.)

In the case of an evaluation completed by a contract psychologist, it is up to the LEA to specify the conditions and scope of the contract psychologist's practice within the terms of his/her contract. The following guidance is offered to LEAs when contracting with individuals for school psychological and other related services:



The contracting provider should:

- Have knowledge of educational policy, specifically related to special education eligibility and service delivery
- Provide documentation of current licensure for personnel to the LEA annually

The LEA should:

- Confirm current licensure through the NC Psychology Board
- Request any complaints filed against that practitioner and background check
- Review contract and performance regularly
- Consider setting different rates of compensation for different job responsibilities (e.g., service delivery or evaluation vs. time for meetings or documentation)
- Consider requiring continuing education hours focused in school-based practice

The contract should:

- Clearly state that all documentation/work products (e.g. daily treatment notes, evaluation reports, test record forms) completed by contracted personnel is the property of the LEA and shall remain in the LEA. LEAs are encouraged to establish a system/timeline for collecting and archiving documentation/work product completed by contracted personnel
- Clearly state roles/duties of contracted personnel (e.g., attending IEP meetings, staff training, duties outside of school hours/work sites)

Revised and Adopted by NCSPA Board of Directors, 11/06/16

References

Federal Register. (2006). *Part II 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301 Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities Final Rule*. Department of Education.

National Association of School Psychologists. (2010). *Principles for professional ethics*.

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